THE LONELY ONES

Father A-13 tells me I am a romantic, a refinement upon an old model, whatever that may mean. I think it important, though, that some of us think about when we were not alone in this world, when Man walked among us, a little behind us as was proper, giving us a sense of companionship somehow lacking in this wilderness.

There are dreamers, who have studied the old memory spools too long, who insist that it was we who walked behind Man, but this is obvious nonsense. The memory spools tell that there was still Man in those days, but we *know* that he was humble before Father A-1, ready to serve the Father of the People.

But somehow, somewheres along in time, this Man appears to have gone away. The records are confusing about this. We do not even know what he looked like, but it seems reasonable to assume that he was like us. They say that he was gone when Father A-1 established the Realm of the People. It is certain that Father A-1, and after him Father A-2, were jointly responsible for the Society that we know today.

We each have our particular responsibility. Mine has been to—carrying some articles with me that apparently have a ritual meaning—take one of the vehicles used for moving about to a particular spot that can be reached by pressing a yellow button.

There have been moments when I have found myself moving sluggishly, and there has been the unexplained urge to press the red button, and then everything has become still and dark. When I have been aware of anything again, I have found Father A-13 bending over me, his eyes—I must ask Father sometimes why they are called that—shining with that soft light that indicates concern. We of the People are unique, no doubt, in that we can sense when something is wrong with one of us. Somehow Father is always there as we revive.

I have a co-worker—I have neglected to mention him before this—a co-worker who carries different articles than I do. Those dreamers who read strange meanings into the old memory spools insist that my co-worker should be called *woMan*, and that he is also made in the image of those who preceded us, but this cannot be true. We all know that Father A-1 and Father A-2 were the builders of this world we live in, assembling those who were to follow in their image, and establishing the Great Hall of Understanding where I and my co-worker stand guard. None of the People have come into the Great Hall in my memory, but it is proper that we stand guard there, because this is what Father A-2 ordered in the long ago.

But you think strange things when you stand there on guard—strange things. I wish sometimes that the old days—the way the dreamers describe them—had come back, and that Man—who must have been like us—again walks silently through the Great Hall. He would be submissive, as befitted his lower status, but it would be strangely comforting to have Man here. There are so few of us, after all, and somehow it seems more and more difficult to move about . . .

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by . . . L. Sprague de Camp

It is a dangerous thing to invoke a God, particularly when this God demands human sacrifices and offerings.

As he ran through the streets of Typhon, Gezun of Gadaira recalled the words of the Ausonian adept he had met in Maxia:

"Typhon rises in black and purple from the mystic margins of the Sea of Thesh, amid the towering tombs of kings who reigned in splendor over Setesh when mighty Torrutseish was but a village and golden Kernê but an empty stretch of beach. No man knows the total tale of Typhon's history, or the convolutions of its streets and secret passages, or the hoarded treasure of its kings, or the hidden powers of its wizards . . ."

Just now Gezun would gladly have given the hoarded treasure of the Seteshan kings to be carried far from this accursed place. For a youth of nineteen, he had seen much since slavers had stolen him from his home in windy Lorsk in Pusâd, or Poseidonis as the Hesperians called it. But he had never seen a city where people tried to tear a man to bits for killing a cat.

He rounded a corner as stones whizzed past him. If there had been only a few Typhonians he would not have fled. As it was, he had laid out two with his staff before

L. Sprague de Camp, one of the leading names in the field since the thirties, is the author of 24 books including the just published historical novel, AN ELEPHANT FOR ARISTOTLE *(Doubleday, $3.95),* TALES OF CONAN *(with R. E. Howard),* TALES FROM GAVAGAN'S BAR *(with Fletcher Pratt),* ROGUE QUEEN, *etc.*

the throng had become too many to handle, even though he was nearly twice their size.

For the Seteshans were a small people, dark, slender, hatchet-faced, and scant of beard, while Gezun was a typical Lorska: over six feet before he had reached his full growth, with the bold rugged features, the big sharp nose, beetling brow, and square jutting jaw of his folk. His skin was almost as dark as a Seteshan's. His hair was thick, black, and curly, and he had a respectable beard despite his youth. A girl in Yavan had told him he looked like a god—not the grim sort of god who broods on people's sins and dispenses doom by thunderbolts, but the kind who roams the earth teaching people to make wine and looking for likely mortal maids on whom to get demigods.

In the open, he could have outrun most Seteshans. But in these twisted streets he hesitated at turnings long enough to let the mob gain back what they had lost in the straight stretches. Furthermore, with such a large crowd, there were bound to be some swift runners. These pressed to the front. Their teeth gleamed, their eyes glared, and foam blew back from their chins. They bore knives, stones, bricks—whatever they had snatched up. Their panting breaths were like the hissing of a thousand snakes.

Gezun passed a tavern where a pair of King Zeremab's archers lounged in the doorway. He slid to a stop and pointed back at the mob.

"They—look—help me—" he gasped.

The soldiers glanced. The mob shrieked: "Slay the cat-killer! Burn the blasphemer! Flay the foul foreigner!"

The soldiers looked at one another. One cried: "Slay the foreign devil!" and drew his dagger.

Gezun hit him over the ear with his staff and knocked him sprawling. The other archer started forward but fell over his companion. Gezun ran on, a corner of his cloak flapping behind him like a flag.

Passing a potter's stall, he jerked the rack of finished pots so that it fell forward with a crash, filling the street with bouncing, rolling, and smashing pots. The obstacle hardly checked the mob. The leaders cleared the pots in long leaps. The rest flowed over them like some natural force. A few fell, but the rest trampled on and scrambled over the fallen, heedless of what bones of their own folk they broke if they could only get at the hated alien.

Another corner. Gezun's teeth showed too as he gasped. His staff got heavier with every stride. Should he throw it away or keep it for his last stand? He had a short bronze Tartessian sword under his cloak, but with the staff he might be able to hold the mob at arms' length. The sword, though deadlier, would let them close enough to fasten on him like the giant leeches of the Tritonian Sea and pull him down.

With a burst of speed, Gezun

gained enough so that he turned one corner before the mob rounded the last one. Coming out upon a street in which Gezun was not to be seen, the mob hesitated before dividing like a stream of ants, half going each way.

Gezun made another turn, into a mere alley, not wide enough to let two men pass unless they sidled past one another. It was so crooked he could see along it only a few paces. On either side rose high walls of stone or brick, without openings save once in a while a stout wooden door. Gezun knew enough of Seteshan customs not to expect help there.

The alley ended. Gezun faced another wall across his path. He was in a cul-de-sac. The walls rose smoothly around him, save where to one side there was a gap a pace wide between two houses. The space was blocked up to the height of a man by a mass of rubble from some earlier edifice, which had been simply pushed into the place between the houses when they were built. A man could climb over the fallen masonry, but beyond it rose the wall of still another house. So the space between the houses formed a minor cul-de-sac, branching off from the main one.

The sound of the mob, muted for the moment, rose again. Plainly, they were coming down the alley to see if he had taken refuge there. The crowd had put off an offshoot, like a tendril, to probe all nearby cavities for its prey. In such a narrow space they could come at him only one or two at a time. If they were mere soldiers he might hold them off, at least until he dropped from exhaustion or somebody fetched a bow to shoot him. But with a mob of fanatics, those behind would push those in front, willing or not, up against Gezun faster than he could knock or cut them down. So the end would be the same, with the swarm fastening on him, using teeth and nails if there was no room to wield a weapon. Teeth and nails would kill one just as dead as swords and spears, and rather more painfully.

Gezun pounded on the nearest door. The copper shutter that closed the peep-hole on the inside moved aside. A black Seteshan eye looked out.

"Let me in," said Gezun. "I am beset."

The shutter moved back into place. Gezun angrily thrust at it with his staff, but it held. He w s not surprised. The noise of the mob grew louder.

The pile of rubble might make a better place for a last stand than the alley proper. Not only was the gap between the houses narrower, but also by mounting the pile one could make the pursuers climb up and whack them on the sconce as they came.

Gezun sprang into the gap and had begun to climb the pile when a voice said: "In here, foreign devil!"

Between the pile of rubble and

the wall of the right-hand house, an opening had appeared. A face, obscured by the deep shadow, looked up.

"Hasten!" said the face.

The crowd-noises sounded as if they were just around the next bend.

Gezun lowered his large feet into the hole and squeezed through. His feet found a dirt floor.

"Out of the way, fool!" said the face. The owner of the face pushed Gezun aside and thrust a piece of old rotten wood into the opening. It cut off most of the light, though since the fit was not tight, some light came into the tunnel around the wood. The tunnel itself was not utterly dark. A flickering light came around the first bend.

"Come," said the man. He was a small brown Seteshan in a long dirty robe. He had sharp irregular features and crooked teeth. He was bald save for gray tufts that stood out over each ear.

The man led the way down the tunnel, muttering: "Hurry, barbarian clod! They may poke around and find my tunnel. And watch your head."

The last advice was too late; Gezun had just hit his forehead on a cross-beam. The tunnel had been built for Seteshans, not towering Pusadians. The roof had been shored up by odd bits of timber, so that to walk through the tunnel one had to duck and dodge with every step. Gezun followed, bent over, his head ringing. He still gasped from his run; his tunic was sweat-soaked.

Around the corner, a Seteshan girl held a rushlight. She walked ahead of the two men, shielding the light with her hand. The tunnel bent this way and that but seemed to be going deeper. The soil, powder-dry near the surface, became moist as they went down. The blistering heat of the Seteshan summer gave way to delicious cool.

The tunnel branched and forked. Gezun tried to remember his turnings but soon gave up.

The tunnel became a regular structure of dressed stone, as if they had reached the crypt of some large building. They halted where the tunnel opened out into a series of rooms. The girl lit two more rushlights. Gezun saw that she was handsome in a slender birdlike way, though she looked a little like the man. Like him she had blue-black hair and olive-brown skin.

"Sit," said the man.

Gezun sank down on a bench and threw off his cloak. He sat holding his head and drinking in the cool air. He sneezed, wiped the drying sweat from his face with a corner of his cloak, and said:

"How came you to save me?"

"I saw the start of the chase," said the man. "I went into my tunnels and later heard the sounds of the mob near another of my entrances. You must have circled round and nearly returned to your starting-place."

"I don't know Typhon well."

"So I see. Who are you?"

"Gezun of Gadaira."

"Where is that?"

"Far to the west. I was born in Poseidonis."

"Of that I have heard; a sinking land in the sea."

"Who are you, sir?"

"Ugaph the son of Shepsaa. This is my daughter Ro. What do you so far from home?"

"I like to wander. I make a living as a wizard."

"*You* a wizard? Ha!"

"I was a pupil of the great Sancheth Sar."

"I never heard of him, and if he was not a Seteshan he cannot have amounted to much."

Gezun shrugged. "I let my clients praise me."

"When got you here?"

"Yesterday. I was strolling about, minding my own business—"

"Slowly, or I cannot understand. You speak our tongue barbarously."

"I was minding my own business and enjoying the sights of the city when your people tried to kill me."

"What led you to do so mad a thing as to slay a cat?"

"I bought a loaf and a fish in the agora for my dinner. Then I went to a tavern by the side of the agora. I bought a mug of barley-beer, and the taverner cooked my fish. I had my dinner laid out on the table outside the tavern and had just turned my head to look at a pretty girl, when this wretched cat leaped to the table and made off with my fish. I struck it with my staff and killed it, and was scraping the dirt off my fish when the mob began screaming and throwing things. By Lyr's barnacles, why?"

"Cats are sacred to Shekhemet. Since nobody hinders them, they take what they like."

"Why don't you kill me, then?"

Ugaph chuckled. "I have no love for the official cults. Priests magnify the powers of their gods to awe their dupes. Often I doubt if gods exist."

"Really? I knew a philosopher in Gadaira who said there were no gods or spirits, but I've known too many supernatural beings for such an extreme view."

Ugaph waved a hand. "Oh, spirits exist. In fact I, who dabble in magic, have my own familiar. But as for gods—well, there are all sorts of theories. Some say they are created by people's belief in them."

"Then let's be careful not to believe in them, lest they get power over us. But what of my fate?"

"I can use you, young man."

"For what?"

"Have you ever hunted bats?"

"No. Why should anybody hunt bats?"

"I have use for them. My daughter has been getting them for me while I went about my business."

"What business is that?"

"I am a collector. As I was saying, Ro has been getting my bats, but I need her help in my business. Moreover she is likelier to catch a

rich husband in the city than prowling dusty tombs."

"I see."

"And furthermore, other members of my profession sometimes try to take from me the part of these tunnels I have marked out for my own, and I need a strong arm and a keen blade to drive them out. So if you will serve as my apprentice, I will hide you, disguise you, and protect you from the superstitious mob."

"Will you also feed me and replace my garments when they wear out?"

"Surely, surely."

"Then let's begin. I was hungry when the mob drove me from my dinner, and now I'm ravenous."

Ugaph wrinkled his nose. "You are not backward. Ro, get Gezun something to eat."

The girl went into the adjoining chamber. Gezun said: "I know not how you can call collecting a business. I've heard of people who spent trade-metal that way, but never of anybody who made it."

"That is simple. I am a benefactor of the people of Typhon."

"Oh?"

"You see, the temples are full of loot of which the priests have fleeced the folk by playing on their fears. I recover this stolen wealth and put it back into circulation. Like this." Ugaph showed a handful of gold, silver, and gems. The pieces of metal seemed to have been broken or cut from larger structures.

Gezun looked at the man with more respect. Of all thieves, the temple-thief needed the most nerve, because of what the priests did if they caught him. The priests of Typhon, especially, were known for the ingenuity of their human sacrifices. Ro came in with a plate of food.

"Thank you, beautiful," said Gezun.

Ugaph said: "Cast no lustful eyes thither, Master Gezun. A daughter of Setesh mates not with foreign devils. It were both immoral and unlawful. Nor think to flout me behind my back, for I have magical powers. I shall watch your every move from afar."

"So?" said Gezun, stuffing his mouth.

Next morning Gezun went to the public stables, where he had left his ass, to get his belongings. Ugaph had fitted him out to look like a Seteshan. Like other commoners of Typhon, he wore only sandals and a linen kilt. His whole head and face had been shaved, save for a short braided scalp-lock behind and a narrow little goatee on his chin. He had left his sword and staff in the tunnels, the former because commoners were not allowed to carry them, the latter because it might help some member of yesterday's mob to recognize him.

When he had gotten back his gear and paid for fodder for his ass, Gezun rejoined Ugaph and his daughter. Ugaph said: "I will take

your bags to our quarters while Ro shows you how to catch bats."

Gezun hesitated about giving up his bags, but Ro would serve as hostage for them. Ro carried two bags herself, one empty and the other containing food and rush-lights.

"Let me bear that for you," Gezun said.

"I see your tribe of barbarians spoils its women," said Ugaph. "Farewell."

Ro led Gezun west, away from the waterfront, picking her way through the maze of crooked streets. Typhon, Gezun thought, stank even worse than Torrutseish. After an hour's walk they passed through a gate in the wall. Beyond the wall, the city thinned out to suburbs. Beyond the suburbs lay fields criss-crossed by irrigation-ditches. Beyond the fields, on the skyline, lines of squat, bulky structures rose from the desert sands. Gezun had seen these on his way to Typhon.

"What are those?" he asked.

"The tombs of our kings," said Ro.

Some of the structures were true pyramids, some truncated pyramids, some stepped pyramids. The tallest of the true pyramids towered hundreds of feet high. Some were new, surrounded by complexes of walls, courts, and temples; others were old, with the complexes robbed of their stones and the pyramids themselves crumbling at the edges.

As they neared the tombs, Gezun noticed that the newer ones seemed manned. Soldiers walked the walls of the complexes, and he glimpsed priests in the courtyards.

"Who are those people?" he asked.

"The attendants of the kings of this dynasty, the ancestors of King Zeremab, on whom be life, health, and strength."

"What about the older tombs, those that seem to be falling down?"

"King Zeremab cares nought for the ghosts of kings of former dynasties. So their tombs have all been plundered and lie open to us."

"Is that where we're going?"

"Aye. I thought we should try the tomb of King Khephru. It has many passages where bats seek refuge during the day."

"Now what in the seven hells does your father want bats for?"

Ro smiled. "His familiar has a taste for bats' blood."

"You mean a familiar demon?"

"Aye, Tety. Here is Khephru's tomb."

She led him into the ruined courtyard, where the sand covered most of the pavement and half-buried such statues as remained. The original entrance to the pyramid had been blocked by blocks of granite, but spoilers had bored through the softer limestone around the granite.

"Watch your step," said Ro, leaping up the first few tiers of stone. "Are you good at making fire?"

"None better." Gezun got out his tinder-box and fire-stones and in a quarter-hour had a rushlight lit. Ro led him into the passage, which sloped down and forked. By the light of the rushcandle Gezun saw more forks.

"By the beard of Roi! This place is like a rabbit-warren," he said.

"Not so loud; you will frighten the bats."

They crept along, talking in whispers. Presently Ro pointed to a little black blob on the roof of the passage. She stole up and snatched it. The bat fluttered and squeaked in her grasp, but she popped it into the bag.

"Now you try," she said.

Gezun missed his first snatch; the awakened bat whirred off into the darkness. There was a chorus of squeaks and a sense of fluttering.

"Clumsy oaf!" whispered Ro. "Now we must wait for them to quiet down again."

"A creepy place! One would expect it to be haunted."

"Some are. King Amentik's tomb has a deadly demon with wings, beak, and claws. Three men who invaded it were torn to bits."

Gezun tried for another bat and caught it. The bat bit his fingers, but its tiny teeth failed to draw blood.

In exploring one passage they came to a place where a large block had fallen from the ceiling. Gezun trod on something hard and looked down. There were human bones on the floor, some half under the block.

"The kings put such in their tombs to foil robbers," said Ro. "When you step on a particular stone—boom! The ceiling falls on your head, or you fall through a trapdoor. I know many such traps, some not yet sprung."

"Hm. I see your father cares not what befalls me when I go to hunt bats by myself."

"Oh, no! We do not wish you slain while you are still useful to us!"

"How kind of you!"

"Fear not; I shall tell you where to hunt each day."

After several hours' hunting, the bat-bag was comfortably full of squeaking, fluttering captives. It moved with a life of its own.

"That will do for today," said Ro. "Let us go back to the entrance and eat."

"I hope you know your way through this maze. Why did the kings put all these tunnels in their tombs? To mislead trespassers?"

"Partly, but also to serve as meeting-places for their cults and to store their treasure, their archives, and the mummies of their kin. You'll find little treasure now, though."

At the entrance they opened the food-bag. When Gezun had eaten and drunk he looked more closely at Ro. She was a pretty little thing. Like most women of Typhon she wore a tight short dress that covered her from knee to midriff. A strip

rose from the front of the dress, between her bare breasts, and encircled her neck.

Gezun ran a hand up and down her body. She slapped the hand away. "My father warned you! Tety might be watching."

Gezun let it go. There would be more opportunities.

Back in Ugaph's quarters, Ro cut the throats of the bats and bled them into a bowl, while Ugaph burned incense and chanted an incantation. When Ro had finished, there was hardly more than a big spoonful of blood in the bowl. Something appeared in the magic circle Ugaph had drawn.

At first Gezun thought it was a cat, but it was a kind of small fox with a snub nose and enormous ears. It frisked around the circle and whined. Ugaph picked up the bowl, saying:

"What news, Tety?"

The familiar spoke in a shrill bark: "The ruby in the left eye of the statue of Ip, in the temple of Ip, is loose."

"Not very helpful, as the statue is higher than a man and set back from a railing. What else?"

"The front rung in the chair of the high-priest in the temple of Neb is also loose. I think not that you can get the rung out without tools, but the golden sheathing is cracked and easily torn off . . ."

After several such responses, Tety said: "I have told you all. Now my blood!"

Ugaph put the bowl inside the circle. The beast lapped up the blood and vanished.

"What's that?" asked Gezun.

"A fennec," said Ugaph. "Now that you are an initiate bat-hunter, I shall take Ro tomorrow. I will try that ruby in the temple of Ip. If she can make a disturbance—say by fainting—I'll knock the gem from its socket with that staff of yours and push it into a recess in the base of the statue. It is an ornate thing, full of hiding-places. Then after a few days I'll slip back in and take the ruby."

"Ho!" said Gezun. "You'll not send me hunting bats by myself yet. Think you I wish to be gobbled by some demon or fall through a trapdoor?"

"Ro can tell you what to do."

"I won't do it alone."

"You shall!"

"I shall not."

"I'll set the mob on you."

"Try it. They'd be interested in your little hoard of stolen sacred things."

"Well then, when will you be able to hunt by yourself?"

"It will take many days of Ro's guidance."

"He's right, father," said Ro. "If we ask too great risks from him, he'll flee."

"Oh, very well, very well. Though so far you've been of no use to me, and you eat enough for three."

Next day Ugaph, still grumbling,

departed on his business while Gezun and Ro went back to the tombs. Again Gezun made exploratory passes and was rebuffed. When he pulled her into his arms she burst into tears, babbling of her father and his demons. Gezun let her go, not because he feared Ugaph and Tety, but because he was of too kindly a nature to make the girl suffer.

So it went for a quarter-moon. Gezun made advances and accepted repulses until one day Ro began to weep almost before he started.

"What now?" he asked.

"Oh, Gezun, see you not? I am truly fond of you; it is all I can do to hold you off. When you look at me with those great brown eyes my sinews turn to water. Yet if you got me with child, my father would slay me."

"I'll take care of him."

"You talk folly. He could cut our throats any night while you lie snoring like a cataract."

"Then let's not go back to your catacombs but flee to Kham."

"Father would charge you with felicide before the magistrate, and King Zeremab's chariots would overtake us on the road."

"Shall I cut your father's throat, then?"

"Nay, not that! I should be accursed forever."

"Oh, come, you don't believe that. Your father's a sceptic."

"I know not what to believe. He cares nought for me. All he wants is for me to keep my virginity until he has sold me to a rich husband. As though one of Typhon's lords would wed the daughter of a temple-thief. But I would not have him slain, especially as Tety might warn him and give him a chance to strike first."

Back in the hideaway they found Ugaph pale and trembly.

"It was a near thing today," he said. "A very near thing. I tried for that ruby in Ip's eye and came a hair's breadth from being caught."

"What happened?" said Gezun.

"I started to thrust with the staff at the eye when a priest came round the corner. He called me a blaspheming robber. He would have given me up to the soldiers had I not pacified him with a large offering and a tale of wishing to draw magical power from the statue. Now I must hide for a time. This priest will have warned his colleagues to watch for me."

"Let me get your supper," said Ro. "Then you'll feel better."

"It is all your fault for not having come with me. I am a poor old benefactor of humanity, but nobody gives me a chance. If there were gods, they would not let the universe run so unjustly."

All through supper, Ugaph whined about the way the world treated him. After supper, over a game of checkers with Gezun, he said:

"For once I think you foreigners are right about Setesh."

"How so?"

"They are a peevish, ungrateful lot, blindly groveling before the most cruel and gloomy gods their priests can imagine, while spurning enlighteners like me."

"Agile fellows!"

Ugaph, who seldom laughed and never saw the point of a joke, went on: "Curse of the green hippopotamus, that one of my virtue should be so put upon! And this is no life for my daughter. How shall she catch a rich husband while lurking in these crypts?"

"Why not change your ways?"

"What can I do? There is no reward for the lifter of superstition. Whoever thinks up some new and bloodthirstier divinity makes his fortune, whilst I starve in squalor—"

"Why not make our fortunes the same way?"

Ugaph stopped in mid-move, holding a draftsman. "My boy, forgive my occasional harsh words. That was a proposal of genius."

"We'll make our god the ghastliest of all. He shall hate everybody and pursue his victims unto the third and fourth generation unless propitiated by huge offerings."

"Just so! He shall demand human sacrifices, to be slain with hideous tortures."

"Why human sacrifices?"

"The Typhonians love the spectacle."

"Well," said Gezun doubtfully, "I don't mind fleecing the Typhonians, but that's going too far."

"It is a common custom here."

"So? How do you go about it?"

"One gets a license."

"But whom do you sacrifice?"

"One buys slaves or kidnaps a foreigner off the street. Nobody minds if he be not of a nation with whom the king has a treaty."

"You mean I could have been seized by some gang all the time I've been here and hauled off to a temple for carving?"

"Surely, surely. Who cares for foreign devils?"

"Well, I care for this foreign devil and will not encourage a practice that might bring my own doom. Besides, it's not a Pusadian custom. If you want my help there shall be no more talk of that."

Ugaph argued, sulked, and gave in. Thus it came to pass that, a quarter-moon later, a peasant on the outskirts of Typhon, hoeing his plot, struck a bronzen tablet.

"Praise be to Neb!" he cried as he dug it up and brushed the dirt off. The tablet was inscribed, though he could not read. It weighed about a pound.

Two men who had been sauntering down the nearby road came over: a snaggle-toothed middle-aged Seteshan and a gigantic young foreigner.

"What is that?" said the middle-aged one.

"I have done nought wrong, my lord," said the peasant. "I found this just now. It was on this plot, which I own in freehold, and so belongs to me."

"What will you do with it?"

"Sell it to a dealer in metals, my lord."

"Hm. Let's have a look at it."

The peasant put the tablet behind him. He could not hide it in his clothes because he wore none. "No you don't, sir. You will snatch it and run, and then where shall I be?"

"All right, you hold it and let me look at it."

Some peasants in the neighboring fields came over to see what was going on. Some travelers on the road stopped too, so presently there were a score of people around Ugaph, Gezun, and the farmer. Ugaph tilted the plaque and read loudly:

"I, Ka the Appalling, eldest and father of the gods, creator and master of the seven universes, shall soon come to dwell in Typhon in the land of Setesh. Woe to the sinners of Typhon! Now you shall be under my very eye. For, I am a great, fierce, and jealous god, at whose very name the other gods tremble. Where they beat you with switches, I shall beat you with cudgels; where they smote the sinner, I shall smite all his kin, neighbors, and friends. Repent ere it is too late! I, Ka the Omnipotent, have spoken."

Ugaph said: "This is surely a portentous matter. Fellow, I will give you half the weight of this tablet in silver, which is more trade-metal than you would normally see in a lifetime. Then I shall take it into the city to see what the wise priests of Typhon make of it."

"Aye, take it!" said the peasant.

A few days later, when the rumor of the finding of the tablet had gone around, Ugaph appeared in the agora. He was naked, with red stripes on his face and ashes on his body. He foamed at the mouth (by chewing soapwort) and altogether was the holiest-looking thing the Typhonians had seen in a long time. He waved the tablet, cried its message in a loud voice, and called on the people to repent. Gezun went about with a basket to catch the wedges and rings and bars of trade-metal they tossed into it.

"A temple for Ka the Appalling!" shrieked Ugaph. "What will he think if he comes to Typhon and finds no god-house? What will he do? What will he do to us? It is our last chance . . ."

Gezun checked a smile. He composed Ugaph's speeches, since Ugaph's talents did not run that way. On the other hand, provided somebody put words in his mouth, the temple-thief made a fine prophet, being of naturally solemn and pompous mien.

After another half-moon they were counting their wealth in the hideout. Ro sorted out the different metals while Ugaph and Gezun weighed them, Ugaph, who had some small education, added up the totals on the wall of the chamber with a burnt stick. He said:

"We have more here than I have made in my whole career as a col-

lector. Why thought I not of this before?"

"Because I wasn't here to suggest it," grinned Gezun. "Now, know you what I'd suggest further?"

"What?"

"That we put this stuff in stout bags and get out of Typhon. We could go to Kham. Your share will keep you in comfort the rest of your life, and mine will take me to all the places I have not yet seen."

"Are you mad, stripling?"

"What mean you?"

"This is nothing to what we shall collect once we get our temple built."

"You mean you would go through with that scheme and not merely talk about it?"

"Surely, surely. I have already seen Sentiu the building-contractor and visited the artist Heqatari. He shall design our temple and the statue of the god."

"Then give me my half, and stay here with yours."

"No! We shall need it all. And think not to take your share by stealth. Remember, it was not I who slew the sacred cat."

Gezun glared but subsided. Ugaph might be right at that: he had had more experience at this sort of thing.

Soon the site of the temple sounded with hammering. Walls rose, floors were laid, and in the midst of it all the great Heqatari worked with his apprentices on the statue. It was to be an imposing affair of gilded bronze, showing a vulture-headed Ka with multiple wings and arms, hurling thunderbolts and brandishing weapons.

When the workmen stopped for their noon meal, Gezun went around to where Heqatari and his apprentices gnawed bread and cheese in the shade of a wall.

"Greetings, great artist," said Gezun. "Can you explain something?"

"What?"

"What's that walled section in the rear, with the deep embayment? It was not in the original plan." Gezun pointed.

"You must mean the stable."

"Stable?"

"Aye. Ugaph has bought a chariot and pair and wishes room to store them on the temple grounds."

"Why, the foul—" began Gezun, when the clopping of hooves made him turn. There came Ugaph, standing in a gold-trimmed chariot drawn by a pair of whites. He reined up, cursing as the horses skittered and bucked and the workmen grinned at his lack of skill. Gezun strode over and began:

"What's this folly? And what mean you by commanding an enlargement of the temple without my knowledge?"

Ugaph's face darkened. "Keep your voice down, stripling, or I shall raise mine too. I might even speak of cats."

Gezun almost sprang upon Ugaph, but mastered his rage and

said: "We shall speak of this again." He walked off.

They had a furious quarrel in the underground chambers that night, Gezun pounding the table and shouting: "You profligate old fool! We're in debt far enough now to put us into debt-slavery for our lives."

"And who told you how to run a cult? You think a babe like you, a third my age and a barbarian to boot, can teach me the art?"

"I can tell when an enterprise is being run to death. Instead of getting out with your paint and ashes and digging more gold out of the Typhonians, you swank around in embroidered robes and drive your gaudy toy."

"That shows your ignorance. By showing the mob how successful we are, we prove our god is truly mighty."

"Said the drunken yokel who fell down the well, how clever I am, for I shall never be thirsty. I want my share of our property, now!"

"You cannot have it. It is tied up in the temple."

"Sell my interest in it, or borrow it. But I want that trade-metal."

"Impossible, you dog. When we have made our fortunes you may ask."

"I'll go to law to force a division."

"See how far you get when the magistrate hears you are a felicide!"

Gezun started to rise, murder in his eyes, when Ro seized his arm, crying: "Gezun! Calm yourself! He has powers!"

A squeak from the corner made them turn. There sat Tety the demon in fennec-form.

"O master!" whined the fox. "It is long since you have fed me. Can I do nought for you?"

"No," said Ugaph. "Begone and bother me not."

"Pray, master! I must have bats' blood. I perish for want of the mystic ingredients."

"Begone!" yelled Ugaph, and ripped out an exorcism. The familiar vanished.

Gezun's temper had cooled, so the quarrel was dropped. For several days Ugaph worked at his evangelism, crying doom about the agora while Gezun collected. Gezun noted that the collections were dwindling.

"By Neb's toenails, it will soon not be worth while," grumbled Ugaph one evening. "All the Typhonians have heard our message and await something new. We must hurry the temple."

"How long will it take?" said Gezun. "By Sentiu's original promises it should be done, but the roof is not yet up."

"That is the way with builders. I see where we made several mistakes, but when we build our big temple those shall be corrected."

"What big temple?"

"Oh, this is only a small affair. As our cult grows, this building will not hold our congregation. We shall build a magnificent structure

like the temple of Shekhemet."

"Hmp. You mean after you've paid off my share."

"Why so eager to withdraw?"

"I tire of Typhon. They hate foreigners as one would expect of some backward Atlantean village, but not of a great city. Besides it is too hot, and the fleas and flies give one no peace."

Ugaph shrugged. "Each to his taste. Tomorrow I will oversee the putting up of the roof."

Next morning, after Ugaph left, Gezun was loafing and watching Ro clean up their breakfast, when Tety appeared, whining: "Good foreign devil, my master neglects and spurns me. I starve for bats' blood."

"That's sad, little one," said Gezun.

"Can you do nought for me?"

Gezun started to say no, then grinned and said to Ro: "Beautiful, those bat-hunts were fun. Let's make another."

"But that long walk? In this heat?"

"We'll use the chariot. It's half mine. And the tombs are cool."

"Oh, bless you, dear mortal!" said Tety.

Hours later they were deep in the bowels of King Khephru's pyramid. When their game-bag was full they went to the entrance and ate. Then Gezun pulled Ro to him and kissed her. She resisted, but not enough, so that what started as a youthful game turned into a real love-tussle. A little later Gezun slept in the tunnel-entrance, snoring thunderously, while Ro wept for her lost maidenhood and covered his face with damp kisses.

Ugaph hung around the temple until Heqatari flew into a tantrum. He cursed Ugaph and all his ancestors because, he said, Ugaph got in his way, distracted him by idiotic suggestions, and did not understand that the artistic soul was purer and finer than the souls of common men. Ugaph, disgruntled, went to the stable where he kept his chariot. He was even more vexed to learn that his partner had taken the vehicle. Scowling, he walked to the palace and gained admittance to the office of the Registrar of Licenses. He asked for a license for human sacrifice.

"You know the rules?" said the Registrar.

"Surely, surely, my lord. Pusadians are not among the protected groups of foreigners, are they?"

"What are Pusadians?"

"Far-western barbarians. Is everything in order, then?"

"The priests of Neb and Shekhemet and the others are up in arms over your competition, but we cannot afford to offend any god. So here is your license."

"I abase myself in humble gratitude, my lord. Come to one of our services."

Ugaph backed out, bowing. Next he went to the thieves' quarter, a tumbledown part of the city where people were either too poor to es-

cape or sought refuge there from King Zeremab's soldiers and officials. He sought out a brawny cutthroat named Eha, whom he had known in his thieving days. He said:

"Are you looking for work, old comrade?"

Eha grinned and flexed a muscle. "I might, if it meant enough metal and not too much work."

"I need a couple of stout fellows to help me with the temple: to sweep the floor, guard the loot, and the like. Have you a friend I could trust?"

"What about that foreign devil, your partner?"

"I think we shall not long be troubled with him. Are you up to desperate deeds?"

"You know me, Ugaph."

Eha got his friend, a silent hulk named Maatab. Ugaph took them to the temple and put them to work on small tasks, such as moving the gear from the hideaway to the temple when the dwelling-rooms were finished. Gezun made only a mild objection to hiring this pair, as Ugaph explained that three could not do all the work of the cult. Gezun was going about starry-eyed, as he had decided he was in love again. Ugaph, who might have been expected to notice the signs that Gezun and Ro gave of their attachment, seemed to pay no attention.

The day came when the last bit of plaster had dried, the last mural had been painted, and the last patch of gold-leaf had been hammered into place. Ugaph called Gezun, Ro, Maatab, and Eha into conference. He sat at the head of the table in a gold-embroidered robe of shiny eastern stuff and a tall pointed hat. He said:

"Tomorrow night is our dedication. The temple will be filled. I have bought an ox for sacrifice to get things started. But our future depends on this ceremony's going smoothly, to get our pious fools worked up to a big donation. Let us be sure we all know our parts perfectly . . ."

When they had rehearsed again, Ugaph said: "Gezun, Maatab and Eha and I are going to fetch our ox. I leave you here to guard the temple. We shall be gone an hour."

He led the two thieves out. Gezun looked at Ro. He had not been alone with her for any length of time since that day in Khephru's tomb. All that made him hesitate was that Ugaph's parting words sounded almost like an invitation. But for one of Gezun's age and vigor, the contest between lust and suspicion was too one-sided to last long.

Ugaph led Maatab and Eha to the main chamber of the temple. In front of the statue of Ka, Ugaph said: "How is your courage?"

Maatab laughed and Eha made muscles.

"Good," murmured Ugaph. "The plan I have discussed is the one that young dog thinks we shall

follow. But what we shall really do is this: He will be in his room at the beginning of the service, primping. He will come out thinking he is to enter the main chamber and slay the ox with the sanctified ax. But you two—"

Eha broke in: "Is it wise to talk of this so near the god?" He jerked his head towards the brooding idol.

"Ha! That is but a thing of bronze and wood. I planned it and Heqatari made it, just as I invented Ka and his whole cult. Unless we believe in a god he cannot exist." Ugaph spat at the statue. "If you fear . . ."

"I? Fear?" protested both thieves at once.

"Well then, listen. As Gezun steps from his room, you two shall seize him. Slay him not, nor even stun him deeply. I wish him awake during the sacrifice; the throng loves the screams of the victim. Bind his wrists and ankles firmly and bear him to the main chamber. Lay him on the altar, and I shall do the rest . . ."

In his chamber, Gezun could hear the voices of the congregation as Ugaph led them in a hymn, for which Ro played a lyre. He put the last touches on his costume: a knee-length kilt embroidered with gold thread, gilded sandals, and an ornate conical cap like Ugaph's but not so tall. He listened for his cue. When it came, he stepped to the leathern curtain in the doorway. His hand was out to thrust the curtain aside when he heard a squeak. There was Tety.

"Gezun!" said the familiar.

"What is it?"

"There is something you must know—"

"No time! Tell me after the service." Gezun reached for the curtain again.

"It is a matter of life and death."

"By the holy crocodile of Haides! Eha and Maatab will be leading in the ox. Save it till later."

"But it is your death! They will slay you instead of the ox."

Gezun stopped. "What's this?"

Tety told of Ugaph's orders. "I was hovering in my spirit form in the temple and came to warn you because of that bats' blood."

"But why should Ugaph slay me?"

"To get sole ownership, to give the Typhonians a gory show, and to see that you shall not object to such sacrifices in the future."

Gezun saw he had been a fool. With a smothered curse he leaped for his belongings and got out the double-curved Tartessian sword. "We shall see who sacrifices whom!"

"Go not into the main chamber!"

"Why not?"

"I know not, but there are portentous stirrings on the spiritual plane. Something dreadful will happen."

"Hm. Anyway, my thanks, little devil."

Gezun went to the doorway on

tiptoe. He stood to one side of the door and jerked the curtain aside. Seeing movement in the dark corridor, he snatched. He caught a muscular arm. With a mighty heave he pulled Eha into the room. Eha struck at him with a short leaden bludgeon. As Eha was off-balance at the time, the blow did not hit squarely. It knocked off Gezun's wizard's hat and grazed his shaven scalp, filling his eyes with stars. He thrust the sword into Eha's neck.

Eha stumbled to hands and knees with a gurgle, dropping the club. Maatab bounded into the room. Gezun tried to withdraw the sword from Eha, but it stuck fast. Then Maatab was upon him.

They staggered back into the middle of the room, kicking, punching, gouging, and grabbing for holds. Maatab hooked a thumb into Gezun's nostrils, but Gezun kicked Maatab in the crotch and sent the Seteshan back groaning. They clinched, fell, and rolled. Gezun felt the bludgeon under his hand. He picked it up and struck at Maatab. The blow struck Maatab's shoulder. Maatab broke away and tore the sword out of Eha.

Then they were up again, fainting, dodging, and striking. Each leaped at the other for a finishing blow, but each caught the other's wrist. They staggered about, each trying to wrench his right arm out of the other's grasp. Gezun felt a grip on his ankle. It was Eha, not yet dead. Gezun fell heavily. Maatab leaped for him, but Gezun flung up both legs and drove his heels into Maatab's belly. The Seteshan was flung back against the wall. He dropped the sword and half fell, coughing and gasping.

Gezun rose and lunged for the sword. There was an instant of floundering as each tried to pick up the weapon and at the same time to kick aside or stamp on the other's groping hand. Then Gezun kicked the sword out into the middle of the room. He scooped it up and straightened to slash at Maatab, who turned and half fell out the doorway.

To kill time, Ugaph had stretched his sermon, reiterating the awfulness, ferocity, and vindictiveness of Ka the Appalling. Then, instead of a bound Gezun being carried out by Eha and Maatab, Maatab appeared running with Gezun after him. Maatab stumbled around to the front of the statue, trying to cry a warning but too winded to speak. Both were dishevelled, their kilts torn, their faces and bodies covered by bruises and scratches. Sweat and blood ran down their limbs. Ro dropped her lyre with a twang.

"He—he—" gasped Maatab, dodging behind Ugaph.

"I'll—" panted Gezun.

Ugaph retreated towards the crowd, shrieking: "Seize the felicide! He is the foreign devil who slew the cat in the Month of the Camel! Tear him to pieces!"

A murmur in the congregation

rose to a roar. Much as Gezun wanted to see the blood of Ugaph and Maatab spurt, he did not wish to be torn to bits afterwards. The crowd fell silent. He stepped back towards the statue and glanced at Ro.

Ro was staring at a point behind him and some feet over his head. He looked up. An arm of gilded bronze, ending in a clawed hand like the foot of a bird of prey, was coming down upon him.

Gezun made a tremendous leap. The wind of the snatch fanned his back.

With a loud creaking, the statue stepped heavily down from its dais. Ugaph and Maatab stared in unbelieving horror, while behind them the audience began to scream and stampede. Ugaph and Maatab turned to run, but two long arms shot out. One arm seized each man, the claws sinking deeply. Ka raised the two kicking, screaming men towards his vulture's beak.

Gezun caught Ro's wrist and dragged her through the other door. Back in the corridor he started for the door to the stable. Then he said: "Wait! Hold this!"

"But Gezun—"

He pressed his sword into her hands and darted into Ugaph's chamber. On the floor lay the chest containing their liquid funds. It was locked and chained to a ring in the wall. Gezun picked up the chest and gave it a mighty heave as if to throw it. On the first try the chain held, but on the second the staple pulled out out of the wall. Gezun ran out with the chest under one arm.

The screams from the main chamber of the temple came higher and higher. They faded behind Gezun as he pulled Ro out to the stable, hitched up the whites, whirled the chariot around, and set out for the north gate at a gallop. They skidded around turns.

"What—what happened?" said Ro.

"Your father didn't believe in Ka, but he convinced so many others that their belief called the god to life."

"But why did Ka animate the statue and attack Father?"

"Well, he was described as fierce and vindictive, so he'd be angry when I wasn't sacrificed as promised. Or perhaps he resented Ugaph's atheism." He slowed the team to a trot. "Let's stop at the fountain to make ourselves look respectable, or the guards won't let us out the gate."

A few minutes later, Gezun whipped up the whites and galloped out on the long level desert road to Kham in the land of Kheru. Behind him, a somber shadow seemed to brood over Typhon.

"Anyway," he said. "I'm through with experiments having to do with gods. Men are hard enough to deal with."

arm of the law

by . . . Harry Harrison

At one time—this was before the Robot Restriction Laws—they'd even allowed them to make their own decisions. . . .

IT WAS a big, coffin-shaped plywood box that looked like it weighed a ton. This brawny type just dumped it through the door of the police station and started away. I looked up from the blotter and shouted at the trucker's vanishing back.

"What the hell is that?"

"How should I know," he said as he swung up into the cab. "I just deliver, I don't X-ray 'em. It came on the morning rocket from earth is all I know." He gunned the truck more than he had to and threw up a billowing cloud of red dust.

"Jokers," I growled to myself. "Mars is full of jokers."

When I went over to look at the box I could feel the dust grate between my teeth. Chief Craig must have heard the racket because he came out of his office and helped me stand and look at the box.

"Think it's a bomb?" he asked in a bored voice.

"Why would anyone bother—particularly with a thing this size? And all the way from earth."

He nodded agreement and walked around to look at the other end. There was no sender's address any-

How could a robot—a machine, after all—be involved in something like law application and violence? Harry Harrison, who will be remembered for his THE VELVET GLOVE *(Nov. 1956) and his more recent* TRAINEE FOR MARS *(June 1958) tells what happens when a police robot hits an outpost on Mars.*

where on the outside. Finally we had to dig out the crowbar and I went to work on the top. After some prying it pulled free and fell off.

That was when we had our first look at Ned. We all would have been a lot happier if it had been our last look as well. If we had just put the lid back on and shipped the thing back to earth! I know now what they mean about Pandora's Box.

But we just stood there and stared like a couple of rubes. Ned lay motionless and stared back at us.

"A robot!" the chief said.

"Very observant; it's easy to see you went to the police academy."

"Ha ha! Now find out what he's doing here."

I hadn't gone to the academy, but this was no handicap to my finding the letter. It was sticking up out of a thick book in a pocket in the box. The Chief took the letter and read it with little enthusiasm.

"Well, well! United Robotics have the brainstorm that . . . *robots, correctly used will tend to prove invaluable in police work* . . . they want us to co-operate in a field test . . . *robot enclosed is the latest experimental model; valued at 120,000 credits.*"

We both looked back at the robot, sharing the wish that the credits had been in the box instead of it. The Chief frowned and moved his lips through the rest of the letter. I wondered how we got the robot out of its plywood coffin.

Experimental model or not, this was a nice looking hunk of machinery. A uniform navy-blue all over, though the outlet cases, hooks and such were a metallic gold. Someone had gone to a lot of trouble to get that effect. This was as close as a robot could look to a cop in uniform, without being a joke. All that seemed to be missing was the badge and gun.

Then I noticed the tiny glow of light in the robot's eye lenses. It had never occurred to me before that the thing might be turned on. There was nothing to lose by finding out.

"Get out of that box," I said.

The robot came up smooth and fast as a rocket, landing two feet in front of me and whipping out a snappy salute.

"Police Experimental Robot, serial number XPO-456-934B reporting for duty, sir."

His voice quivered with alertness and I could almost hear the humming of those taut cable muscles. He may have had a stainless steel hide and a bunch of wires for a brain—but he spelled rookie cop to me just the same. The fact that he was man-height with two arms, two legs and that painted-on uniform helped. All I had to do was squint my eyes a bit and there stood Ned the Rookie Cop. Fresh out of school and raring to go. I shook my head to get rid of the illusion. This was just six feet of machine

that boffins and brain-boys had turned out for their own amusement.

"Relax Ned," I said. He was still holding the salute. "At ease. You'll get a hernia of your exhaust pipe if you stay so tense. Anyways, I'm just the sergeant here. That's the Chief of Police over there.

Ned did an about face and slid over to the Chief with that same greased-lightning motion. The Chief just looked at him like something that sprang out from under the hood of a car, while Ned went through the same report routine.

"I wonder if it does anything else beside salute and report," the Chief said while he walked around the robot, looking it over like a dog with a hydrant.

"The functions, operations and responsible courses of action open to the Police Experimental Robots are outlined on pages 184 to 213 of the manual." Ned's voice was muffled for a second while he half-dived back into his case and came up with the volume mentioned. "A detailed breakdown of these will also be found on pages 1035 to 1267 inclusive."

The Chief, who has trouble reading an entire comic page at one sitting, turned the 6-inch thick book over in his hands like it would maybe bite him. When he had a rough idea of how much it weighed and a good feel of the binding he threw it on my desk.

"Take care of this," he said to me as he headed towards his office. "And the robot too. Do something with it." The Chief's span of attention never was great and it had been strained to the limit this time.

I flipped through the book, wondering. One thing I never have had much to do with is robots, so I know just as much about them as any Joe in the street. Probably less. The book was filled with pages of fine print, fancy mathematics, wiring diagrams and charts in nine colors and that kind of thing. It needed close attention. Which attention I was not prepared to give at the time. The book slid shut and I eyed the newest employee of the city of Nineport.

"There is a broom behind the door. Do you know how to use it?"

"Yes, sir."

"In that case you will sweep out this room, raising as small a cloud of dust as possible at the same time."

He did a very neat job of it.

I watched 120,000 credits worth of machinery making a tidy pile of butts and sand and wondered why it had been sent to Nineport. Probably because there wasn't another police force in the solar system that was smaller or more unimportant than ours. The engineers must have figured this would be a good spot for a field test. Even if the thing blew up, nobody would really mind. There would probably be someone along some day to get a report on it. Well, they had picked the right spot all right. Nineport was just a little bit beyond nowhere.

Which, of course, was why I was there. I was the only real cop on the force. They needed at least one to give an illusion of the wheels going around. The Chief, Alonzo Craig, had just enough sense to take graft without dropping the money. There were two patrolmen. One old and drunk most of the time. The other so young the only scar he had was the mark of the attram. I had ten years on a metropolitan force, earthside. Why I left is nobody's damn business. I have long since paid for any mistakes I made there by ending up in Nineport.

Nineport is not a city, it's just a place where people stop. The only permanent citizens are the ones who cater to those on the way through. Hotel keepers, restaurant owners, gamblers, barkeeps, and the rest.

There is a spaceport, but only some freighters come there. To pick up the metal from some of the mines that are still working. Some of the settlers still came in for supplies. You might say that Nineport was a town that just missed the boat. In a hundred years I doubt if there will be enough left sticking of the sand to even tell where it used to be. I won't be there either, so I couldn't care less.

I went back to the blotter. Five drunks in the tank, an average night's haul. While I wrote them up Fats dragged in the sixth one.

"Locked himself in the ladies' john at the spaceport and resisting arrest," he reported.

"D and D. Throw him in with the rest."

Fats steered his limp victim across the floor, matching him step for dragging step. I always marveled at the way Fats took care of drunks, since he usually had more under his belt than they had. I have never seen him falling down drunk or completely sober. About all he was good for was keeping a blurred eye on the lockup and running in drunks. He did well at that. No matter what they crawled under or on top of, he found them. No doubt due to the same shared natural instincts.

Fats clanged the door behind number six and weaved his way back in. "What's that?" he asked, peering at the robot along the purple beauty of his nose.

"That is a robot. I have forgotten the number his mother gave him at the factory so we will call him Ned. He works here now."

"Good for him! He can clean up the tank after we throw the bums out."

"That's *my* job," Billy said coming in through the front door. He clutched his nightstick and scowled out from under the brim of his uniform cap. It is not that Billy is stupid, just that most of his strength has gone into his back instead of his mind.

"That's Ned's job now because you have a promotion. You are going to help me with some of my work."

Billy came in very handy at times

and I was anxious that the force shouldn't lose him. My explanation cheered him because he sat down by Fats and watched Ned do the floor.

That's the way things went for about a week. We watched Ned sweep and polish until the station began to take on a positively antiseptic look. The Chief, who always has an eye out for that type of thing, found out that Ned could file the odd ton of reports and paperwork that cluttered his office. All this kept the robot busy, and we got so used to him we were hardly aware he was around. I knew he had moved the packing case into the storeroom and fixed himself up a cozy sort of robot dormitory-coffin. Other than that I didn't know or care.

The operation manual was buried in my desk and I never looked at it. If I had, I might have had some idea of the big changes that were in store. None of us knew the littlest bit about what a robot can or cannot do. Ned was working nicely as a combination janitor-file clerk and should have stayed that way. He would have too if the Chief hadn't been so lazy. That's what started it all.

It was around nine at night and the Chief was just going home when the call came in. He took it, listened for a moment, then hung up.

"Greenback's liquor store. He got held up again. Says to come at once."

"That's a change. Usually we don't hear about it until a month later. What's he paying protection money for if China Joe ain't protecting? Wat's the rush now?"

The Chief chewed his loose lip for awhile, finally and painfully reached ā decision.

"You better go around and see what the trouble is."

"Sure," I said reaching for my cap. "But no one else is around, you'll have to watch the desk until I get back."

"That's no good," he moaned. "I'm dying from hunger and sitting here isn't going to help me any."

"I will go take the report," Ned said, stepping forward and snapping his usual well-greased salute.

At first the Chief wasn't buying. You would think the water cooler came to life and offered to take over his job.

"How could *you* take a report?" he growled, putting the wise-guy water cooler in its place. But he had phrased his little insult as a question so he had only himself to blame. In exactly three minutes Ned gave the Chief a summary of the routine necesary for a police officer to make a report on an armed robbery or other reported theft. From the glazed look in Chief's protruding eyes I could tell Ned had quickly passed the boundaries of the Chief's meager knowledge.

"Enough!" the harried man finally gasped. "If you know so much why don't you make a report?"

Which to me sounded like an-

other version of *"if you're so damned smart why ain't you rich?"* which we used to snarl at the brainy kids in grammar school. Ned took such things literally though, and turned towards the door.

"Do you mean you wish me to make a report on this robbery?"

"Yes," the Chief said just to get rid of him, and we watched his blue shape vanish through the door.

"He must be brighter than he looks," I said. "He never stopped to ask where Greenback's store is."

The Chief nodded and the phone rang again. His hand was still resting on it so he picked it up by reflex. He listened for a second and you would have thought someone was pumping blood out of his heel from the way his face turned white.

"The holdup's still on," he finally gasped. "Greenback's delivery boy is on the line—calling back to see where we are. Says he's under a table in the back room. . . ."

I never heard the rest of it because I was out the door and into the car. There were a hundred things that could happen if Ned got there before me. Guns could go off, people hurt, lots of things. And the police would be to blame for it all—sending a tin robot to do a cop's job. Maybe the Chief had ordered Ned there, but clearly as if the words were painted on the windshield of the car, I knew I would be dragged into it. It never gets very warm on Mars, but I was sweating.

Nineport has fourteen traffic regulations and I broke all of them before I had gone a block. Fast as I was, Ned was faster. As I turned the corner I saw him open the door of Greenback's store and walk in. I screamed brakes in behind him and arrived just in time to have a gallery seat. A shooting gallery at that.

There were two holdup punks, one behind the counter making like a clerk and the other lounging off to the side. Their guns were out of sight, but blue-coated Ned busting through the door like that was too much for their keyed up nerves. Up came both guns like they were on strings and Ned stopped dead. I grabbed for my own gun and waited for pieces of busted robot to come flying through the window.

Ned's reflexes were great. Which I suppose is what you should expect of a robot.

"DROP YOUR GUNS, YOU ARE UNDER ARREST."

He must have had on full power or something, his voice blasted so loud my ears hurt. The result was just what you might expect. Both torpedoes let go at once and the air was filled with flying slugs. The show windows went out with a crash and I went down on my stomach. From the amount of noise I knew they both had recoilless .50's. You can't stop one of those slugs. They go right through you and anything else that happens to be in the way.

Except they didn't seem to be

bothering Ned. The only notice he seemed to take was to cover his eyes. A little shield with a thin slit popped down over his eye lenses. Then he moved in on the first thug.

I knew he was fast, but not that fast. A couple of slugs jarred him as he came across the room, but before the punk could change his aim Ned had the gun in his hand. That was the end of that. He put on one of the sweetest hammer locks I have ever seen and neatly grabbed the gun when it dropped from the limp fingers. With the same motion that slipped the gun into a pouch he whipped out a pair of handcuffs and snapped them on the punk's wrists.

Holdupnik number two was heading for the door by then, and I was waiting to give him a warm reception. There was never any need. He hadn't gone halfway before Ned slid in front of him. There was a thud when they hit that didn't even shake Ned, but gave the other a glazed look. He never even knew it when Ned slipped the cuffs on him and dropped him down next to his partner.

I went in, took their guns from Ned, and made the arrest official. That was all Greenback saw when he crawled out from behind the counter and it was all I wanted him to see. The place was a foot deep in broken glass and smelled like the inside of a Jack Daniels bottle. Greenback began to howl like a wolf over his lost stock. He didn't seem to know any more about the phone call than I did, so I grabbed ahold of a pimply looking kid who staggered out of the storeroom. He was the one who had made the calls.

It turned out to be a matter of sheer stupidity. He had worked for Greenback only a few days and didn't have enough brains to realize that all holdups should be reported to the protection boys instead of the police. I told Greenback to wise up his boy, as look at the trouble that got caused. Then pushed the two ex-holdup men out to the car. Ned climbed in back with them and they clung together like two waifs in a storm. The robot's only response was to pull a first aid kit from his hip and fix up a ricochet hole in one of the thugs that no one had noticed in the excitement.

The Chief was still sitting there with that bloodless look when we marched in. I didn't believe it could be done, but he went two shades whiter.

"You made the pinch," he whispered. Before I could straighten him out a second and more awful idea hit him. He grabbed a handful of shirt on the first torpedo and poked his face down. "You with China Joe," he snarled.

The punk made the error of trying to be cute so the Chief let him have one on the head with the open hand that set his eyes rolling like marbles. When the question got

asked again he found the right answer.

"I never heard from no China Joe. We just hit town today and—"

"Freelance, by God," the Chief sighed and collapsed into his chair. "Lock 'em up and quickly tell me what in hell happened."

I slammed the gate on them and pointed a none too steady finger at Ned.

"There's the hero," I said. "Took them on single-handed, rassled them for a fall and made the capture. He is a one-robot tornado, a power for good in this otherwise evil community. And he's bullet-proof too." I ran a finger over Ned's broad chest. The paint was chipped by the slugs, but the metal was hardly scratched.

"This is going to cause me trouble, big trouble," the Chief wailed.

I knew he meant with the protection boys. They did not like punks getting arrested and guns going off without their okay. But Ned thought the Chief had other worries and rushed in to put them right. "There will be no trouble. At no time did I violate any of the Robotic Restriction Laws, they are part of my control circuits and therefore fully automatic. The men who drew their guns violated both robotic and human law when they threatened violence. I did not injure the men—merely restrained them."

It was all over the Chief's head, but I liked to think *I* could follow it. And I *had* been wondering how a robot—a machine—could be involved in something like law application and violence. Ned had the answer to that one too.

"Robots have been assuming these functions for years. Don't recording radar meters pass judgment on human violation of automobile regulations? A robot alcohol detector is better qualified to assess the sobriety of a prisoner than the arresting officer. At one time robots were even allowed to make their own decisions about killing. Before the Robotic Restriction Laws automatic gun-pointers were in general use. Their final development was a self-contained battery of large anti-aircraft guns. Automatic scan radar detected all aircraft in the vicinity. Those that could not return the correct identifying signal had their courses tracked and computed, automatic fuse-cutters and loaders readied the computer-aimed guns—which were fired by the robot mechanism."

There was little I could argue about with Ned. Except maybe his college-professor vocabulary. So I switched the attack.

"But a robot can't take the place of a cop, it's a complex human job."

"Of course it is, but taking a human policeman's place is not the function of a police robot. Primarily I combine the functions of numerous pieces of police equipment, integrating their operations and making them instantly available. In addition I can aid in the *mechanical*

processes of law enforcement. If you arrest a man you handcuff him. But if you order me to do it, I have made no moral decision. I am just a machine for attaching handcuffs at that point. . . ."

My raised hand cut off the flow of robotic argument. Ned was hipped to his ears with facts and figures and I had a good idea who would come off second best in any continued discussion. No laws had been broken when Ned made the pinch, that was for sure. But there are other laws than those that appear on the books.

"China Joe is not going to like this, not at all," the Chief said, speaking my own thoughts.

The law of Tooth and Claw. That's one that wasn't in the law books. And that was what ran Nineport. The place was just big enough to have a good population of gambling joints, bawdy houses and drunk-rollers. They were all run by China Joe. As was the police department. We were all in his pocket and you might say he was the one who paid our wages. This is not the kind of thing, though, that you explain to a robot.

"Yeah, China Joe."

I thought it was an echo at first, then realized that someone had eased in the door behind me. Something called Alex. Six feet of bone, muscle and trouble. China Joe's right hand man. He imitated a smile at the Chief who sank a bit lower in his chair.

"China Joe wants you should tell him why you got smart cops going around and putting the arm on people and letting them shoot up good liquor. He's mostly angry about the hooch. He says that he had enough guff and after this you should—"

"I am putting you under Robot Arrest, pursuant to article 46, paragraph 19 of the revised statutes. . . ."

Ned had done it before we realized he had even moved. Right in front of our eyes he was arresting Alex and signing our death warrants.

Alex was not slow. As he turned to see who had grabbed him, he had already dragged out this cannon. He got one shot in, square against Ned's chest, before the robot plucked the gun away and slipped on the cuffs. While we all gaped like dead fish, Ned recited the charge in what I swear was a satisfied tone.

"The prisoner is Peter Rakjomskj, alias Alex the Axe, wanted in Canal City for armed robbery and attempted murder. Also wanted by local police of Detroit, New York and Manchester on charges of. . . ."

"Get it off me!" Alex howled. We might have too, and everything might have still been straightened out if Benny Bug hadn't heard the shot. He popped his head in the front door just long enough to roll his eyes over our little scene.

"Alex . . . they're puttin' the arm on Alex!"

Then he was gone and when I

hit the door he was nowhere in sight. China Joe's boys always went around in pairs. And in ten minutes he would know all about it.

"Book him," I told Ned. "It wouldn't make any difference if we let him go now. The world has already come to an end."

Fats came in then, mumbling to himself. He jerked a thumb over his shoulder when he saw me.

"What's up? I see little Benny Bug come out of here like the place was on fire and almost get killed driving away?"

Then Fats saw Alex with the bracelets on and turned sober in one second. He just took a moment to gape, then his mind was made up. Without a trace of a stagger he walked over to the Chief and threw his badge on the desk in front of him.

"I am an old man and I drink too much to be a cop. Therefore I am resigning from the force. Because if that is whom I think it is over there with the cuffs on, I will not live to be a day older as long as I am around here."

"Rat." The Chief growled in pain through his clenched teeth. "Deserting the sinking ship. Rat."

"Squeak," Fats said and left.

The Chief was beyond caring at this point. He didn't blink an eye when I took Fats' badge off the desk. I don't know why I did it, perhaps I thought it was only fair. Ned had started all the trouble and I was just angry enough to want him on the spot when it was finished. There were two rings on his chest plate, and I was not surprised when the badge pin fitted them neatly.

"There, now you are a real cop." Sarcasm dripped from the words. I should have realized that robots are immune to sarcasm. Ned took my statement at face value.

"This is a very great honor, not only for me but for all robots. I will do my best to fulfill all the obligations of the office." Jack Armstrong in tin underwear. I could hear the little motors in his guts humming with joy as he booked Alex.

If everything else hadn't been so bad I would have enjoyed that. Ned had more police equipment built into him than Nineport had ever owned. There was an ink pad that snapped out of one hip, and he efficiently rolled Alex's fingertips across it and stamped them on a card. Then he held the prisoner at arm's length while something clicked in his abdomen. Once more sideways and two instant photographs dropped out of a slot. The mug shots were stuck on the card, arrest details and such inserted. There was more like this, but I forced myself away. There were more important things to think about.

Like staying alive.

"Any ideas Chief?"

A groan was my only answer so I let it go at that. Billy, the balance of the police force, came in then. I gave him a quick rundown.

Either through stupidity or guts he elected to stay, and I was proud of the boy. Ned locked away the latest prisoner and began sweeping up.

That was the way we were when China Joe walked in.

Even though we were expecting it, it was still a shock. He had a bunch of his toughest hoods with him and they crowded through the door like an overweight baseball team. China Joe was in front, hands buried in the sleeves of his long mandarin gown. No expression at all on his ascetic features. He didn't waste time talking to us, just gave the word to his own boys.

"Clean this place up. The new police Chief will be here in a while and I don't want him to see any bums hanging around."

It made me angry. Even with the graft I like to feel I'm still a cop. Not on a cheap punk's payroll. I was also curious about China Joe. Had been ever since I tried to get a line on him and never found a thing. I still wanted to know.

"Ned, take a good look at that Chinese guy in the rayon bathrobe and let me know who he is."

My, but those electronic circuits work fast. Ned shot the answer back like a straight man who had been rehearsing his lines for weeks.

"He is a pseudo-oriental, utilizing a natural sallowness of the skin heightened with dye. He is not Chinese. There has also been an operation on his eyes, scars of which are still visible. This has been undoubtedly done in an attempt to conceal his real identity, but Bertillon measurements of his ears and other features make identity positive. He is on the Very Wanted list of Interpol and his real name is . . ."

China Joe was angry, and with a reason.

"That's the *thing* . . . that big-mouthed tin radio set over there. We heard about it and we're taking care of it!"

The mob jumped aside then or hit the deck and I saw there was a guy kneeling in the door with a rocket launcher. Shaped anti-tank charges, no doubt. That was my last thought as the thing let go with a "whoosh."

Maybe you can hit a tank with one of those. But not a robot. At least not a police robot. Ned was sliding across the floor on his face when the back wall blew up. There was no second shot. Ned closed his hand on the tube of the bazooka and it was so much old drainpipe.

Billy decided then that anyone who fired a rocket in a police station was breaking the law, so he moved in with his club. I was right behind him since I did not want to miss any of the fun. Ned was at the bottom somewhere, but I didn't doubt he could take care of himself.

There were a couple of muffled shots and someone screamed. No one fired after that because we were too tangled up. A punk named Brooklyn Eddie hit me on the side of the head with his gunbutt and

I broke his nose all over his face with my fist.

There is a kind of a fog over everything after that. But I do remember it was very busy for awhile.

When the fog lifted a bit I realized I was the only one still standing. Or leaning rather. It was a good thing the wall was there.

Ned came in through the street door carrying a very bashed looking Brooklyn Eddie. I hoped I had done all that. Eddie's wrists were fastened together with cuffs. Ned laid him gently next to the heap of thugs—who I suddenly realized all wore the same kind of handcuffs. I wondered vaguely if Ned made them as he needed them or had a supply tucked away in a hollow leg or something.

There was a chair a few feet away and sitting down helped.

Blood was all over everything and if a couple of the hoods hadn't groaned I would have thought they were corpses. One was, I noticed suddenly. A bullet had caught him in the chest, most of the blood was probably his.

Ned burrowed in the bodies for a moment and dragged Billy out. He was unconscious. A big smile on his face and the splintered remains of his nightstick still stuck in his fist. It takes very little to make some people happy. A bullet had gone through his leg and he never moved while Ned ripped the pants leg off and put on a bandage.

"The spurious China Joe and one other man escaped in a car," Ned reported.

"Don't let it worry you," I managed to croak. "Your batting average still leads the league."

It was then I realized the Chief was still sitting in his chair, where he had been when the bruhaha started. Still slumped down with that glazed look. Only after I started to talk to him did I realize that Alonzo Craig, Chief of Police of Nineport, was now dead.

A single shot. Small caliber gun, maybe a .22. Right through the heart and what blood there had been was soaked up by his clothes. I had a good idea where the gun would be that fired that shot. A small gun, the kind that would fit in a wide Chinese sleeve.

I wasn't tired or groggy any more. Just angry. Maybe he hadn't been the brightest or most honest guy in the world. But he deserved a better end than that. Knocked off by a two-bit racket boss who thought he was being crossed.

Right about then I realized I had a big decision to make. With Billy out of the fight and Fats gone I was the Nineport police force. All I had to do to be clear of this mess was to walk out the door and keep going. I would be safe enough.

Ned buzzed by, picked up two of the thugs, and hauled them off to the cells.

Maybe it was the sight of his blue back or maybe I was tired of running. Either way my mind was made up before I realized it. I care-

fully took off the Chief's gold badge and put it on in place of my old one.

"The new Chief of Police of Nineport," I said to no one in particular.

"Yes, sir," Ned said as he passed. He put one of the prisoners down long enough to salute, then went on with his work. I returned the salute.

The hospital meat wagon hauled away the dead and wounded. I took an evil pleasure in ignoring the questioning stares of the attendants. After the doc fixed the side of my head, everyone cleared out. Ned mopped up the floor. I ate ten aspirin and waited for the hammering to stop so I could think what to do next.

When I pulled my thoughts together the answer was obvious. Too obvious. I made as long a job as I could of reloading my gun.

"Refill your handcuff box, Ned. We are going out."

Like a good cop he asked no questions. I locked the outside door when we left and gave him the key.

"Here. There's a good chance you will be the only one left to use this before the day is over."

I stretched the drive over to China Joe's place just as much as I could. Trying to figure if there was another way of doing it. There wasn't. Murder had been done and Joe was the boy I was going to pin it on. So I had to get him.

The best I could do was stop around the corner and give Ned a briefing.

"This combination bar and dice-room is the sole property of he whom we will still call China Joe until there is time for you to give me a rundown on him. Right now I got enough distractions. What we have to do is go in there, find Joe and bring him to justice. Simple?"

"Simple," Ned answered in his sharp Joe-college voice. "But wouldn't it be simpler to make the arrest now, when he is leaving in that car, instead of waiting until he returns?"

The car in mention was doing sixty as it came out of the alley ahead of us. I only had a glimpse of Joe in the back seat as it tore by us.

"Stop them!" I shouted, mostly for my own benefit since I was driving. I tried to shift gears and start the engine at the same time, and succeeded in doing exactly nothing.

So Ned stopped them. It had been phrased as an order. He leaned his head out of the window and I saw at once why most of his equipment was located in his torso. Probably his brain as well. There sure wasn't much room left in his head when that cannon was tucked away in there.

A .75 recoil-less. A plate swiveled back right where his nose should have been if he had one, and the big muzzle pointed out. It's a neat idea when you think about it. Right

between the eyes for good aiming, up high, always ready.

The BOOM BOOM almost took my head off. Of course Ned was a perfect shot—so would I be with a computer for a brain. He had holed one rear tire with each slug and the car flap-flapped to a stop a little ways down the road. I climbed out slowly while Ned sprinted there in seconds flat. They didn't even try to run this time. What little nerve they had left must have been shattered by the smoking muzzle of that .75 poking out from between Ned's eyes. Robots are neat about things like that so he must have left it sticking out deliberate. Probably had a course in psychology back in robot school.

Three of them in the car, all waving their hands in the air like the last reel of a western. And the rear floor covered with interesting little suitcases.

Everyone came along quietly.

China Joe only snarled while Ned told me that his name really was Stantin and the Elmira hot seat was kept warm all the time in hopes he would be back. I promised Joe-Stantin I would be happy to arrange it that same day. Thereby not worrying about any slip-ups with the local authorities. The rest of the mob would stand trial in Canal City.

It was a very busy day.

Things have quieted down a good deal since then. Billy is out of the hospital and wearing my old sergeant's stripes. Even Fats is back, though he is sober once in a while now and has trouble looking me in the eye. We don't have much to do because in addition to being a quiet town this is now an honest one.

Ned is on foot patrol nights and in charge of the lab and files days. Maybe the Policeman's Benevolent wouldn't like that, but Ned doesn't seem to mind. He touched up all the bullet scratches and keeps his badge polished. I know a robot can't be happy or sad—but Ned *seems* to be happy.

Sometimes I would swear I can hear him humming to himself. But, of course, that is only the motors and things going around.

When you start thinking about it, I suppose we set some kind of precedent here. What with putting on a robot as a full-fledged police officer. No one ever came around from the factory yet, so I have never found out if we're the first or not.

And I'll tell you something else. I'm not going to stay in this broken down town forever. I have some letters out now, looking for a new job.

So some people are going to be *very* surprised when they see who their new Chief of Police is after *I* leave.

the flying cuspidors

by . . . V. R. Francis

This was love, and what could be done about it? It's been happening to guys for a long time, now.

HOTLIPS GROGAN may not be as handsome and good-looking like me or as brainy and intellectual, but in this fiscal year of 2056 he is the gonest trumpet-tooter this side of Alpha Centauri. You would know what I mean right off if you ever hear him give out with "Stars Fell on Venus," or "Martian Love Song," or "Shine On, Harvest Luna." Believe me, it is out of this world. He is not only hot, he is radioactive. On a clear day he is playing notes you cannot hear without you are wearing special equipment.

That is for a fact.

Mostly he is a good man—cool, solid, and in the warp. But one night he is playing strictly in three or four wrong keys.

I am the ivory man for this elite bunch of musicians, and I am scooping up my three-dee music from the battered electronic eighty-eight when he comes over looking plenty worried.

"Eddie," he says, "I got a problem."

"You got a problem, all right," I tell him. "You are not getting a job selling Venusian fish, the way you play today."

A trumpet tooter in love can be a wonderful sight, if Local 802 will forgive our saying so; when extraterrestrials get involved too—oh brother! V. R. Francis, who lives in California and has previously appeared in men's magazines, became 21 and sold to FANTASTIC UNIVERSE *all in the same week.*

He frowns. "It is pretty bad, I suppose."

"Bad is not the word," I say, but I spare his feelings and do not say the word it is. "What gives?"

He looks around him, careful to see if anybody in the place is close enough to hear. But it is only afternoon rehearsal on the gambling ship *Saturn,* and the waiters are busy mopping up the floor and leaning on their long-handled sterilizers, and the boys in the band are picking up their music to go down to Earth to get some shut-eye or maybe an atomic beer or two before we open that night.

Hotlips Grogan leans over and whispers in my ear. "It is the thrush," he says.

"The thrush?" I say, loud, before he clamps one of his big hands over my kisser. "The thrush," I say, softer; "you mean the canary?"

He waves his arms like a bird. "Thrush, canary—I mean Stella Starlight."

For a minute I stand with my mouth open and think of this. Then I rubber for the ninety-seventh time at the female warbler, who is standing talking to Frankie, the band leader. She is a thrush new to the band and plenty cute—a blonde, with everything where it is supposed to be, and maybe a little extra helping in a couple spots. I give her my usual approving once-over, just in case I miss something the last ninety-six approving once-overs I give her.

"What about her?" I say.

"It is her fault I play like I do," Hotlips Grogan tells me sadly. "Come on. Leave us go guzzle a beer and I will tell you about it."

Just then Frankie comes over, looking nasty like is usual, and he says to Grogan, "You are not playing too well today, Hotlips. Maybe you hurt your lip on a beer bottle, huh?"

As usual also, his tone is pretty short on sweetness and light, and I do not see why Grogan, who looks something like a gorilla's mother-in-law, takes such guff from a beanpole like Frankie.

But Grogan only says, "I think something is wrong with my trumpet. I have it fixed before tonight."

Frankie smirks. "Do that," he says, looking like a grinning weasel. "We want you to play for dancing, not for calling in Martian moose."

Frankie walks away, and Hotlips shrugs.

"Leave us get our beer," he says simply, and we go to the ferry.

We pile into the space-ferry with the other musicians and anyone else who is going down to dirty old terra firma, and when everybody who is going aboard is aboard, the doors close, and the ferry drifts into space. Hotlips and I find seats, and we look back at the gambling ship. It is a thrill you do not get used to, no matter how many times you see it.

The sailor boys who build the *Saturn*—they give it the handle of *Satellite II* then—would not know their baby now, Frankie does

such a good job of revamping it. Of course, it is not used as a gambling ship then—at least not altogether, if you know what I mean. Way back in 1998 when they get it in the sky, they are more interested in it being useful than pretty; anybody that got nasty and unsanitary ideas just forgot them when they saw that iron casket floating in a sky that could be filled with hydrogen bombs or old laundry without so much as a four-bar intro as warning.

Frankie buys *Satellite II* at a war surplus sale when moon flights become as easy as commuters' trips, and he smoothes out its shape so it looks like an egg and then puts a fin around it for ships to land on. After that, it does not take much imagination to call it the *Saturn*. Then he gets his Western Hemisphere license and opens for business.

My daydreaming stops, for suddenly Hotlips is grabbing my arm and pointing out the window.

"What for are you grabbing my arm and waving your fist at the window, Hotlips?" I inquire politely of him.

"Eddie," he whispers, all nervous and excited from something, "I see one."

I give him a blank stare. "You see one what?"

"One flying cuspidor," he says, his face serious. "I see it hanging out there by the *Saturn* and then suddenly it is gone. Whoosh."

"Hallucination," I tell him. But I look out hard and try to see one too. I don't, so I figure maybe I am right, after all.

I do not know about this "men from space" gimmick the science-fiction people try to peddle, but lots of good substantial citizens see flying cuspidors and I think to myself that maybe there is something to it. So I keep looking back at the *Saturn,* but nothing unusual is going on that I can see. My logic and super-salesmanship evidently convinces Hotlips, for he does not say anything more about it.

Anyway, in a few minutes we joggle to a stop at Earthport, pile out, wave our identification papers at the doorman with the lieutenant's bars, and then take off for the *Atomic Cafe* a block away.

Entering this gem of a drinking establishment, we make our way through the smoke and noise to a quiet little corner table and give Mamie the high-sign for two beers. A few minutes later she comes bouncing over with the order and a cheery word about how invigorating it is to see us high-class gentlemen instead of the bums that usually hang around a joint like this trying to make time with a nice girl like her.

"That is all very nice," I say to her politely, "and we are overjoyed beyond words to see you too, Mamie, but Hotlips and I have got strange and mysterious things to discuss, so I would appreciate it if you would see us later instead of now." With this, I give her arm a

playful pat, and she blushes and takes the hint.

When we are alone, I ask Hotlips, now what is the trouble which he has.

"Like I tell you before," Hotlips says, "I have a problem. So here it is." He takes a deep breath and lets fly all at once. "I am in love of the thrush, Stella Starlight."

I am drinking my beer when he says this, and suddenly I get a snootful and start coughing, and he whams me on the back with his big paw so I stop, more in self-defense than in his curing me. Somehow, the idea of a big bruiser like Hotlips Grogan in love of a sweet fluffy thing like Stella Starlight seems funny.

"So?" I say.

"So that is why I play so bad tonight," he says. Seeing I do not quite catch on to the full intent of his remarks, he continues. "I am a happy man, Eddie. I got my trumpet, a paid-for suit of clothes, a one-room apartment with green wallpaper. Could a man ask for much more?"

"Not unless he is greedy," I agree.

Hotlips Grogan is staring at his beer as though he sees a worm in it and looking sadder than ever. "It is a strange and funny thing," he says, dreamy-like. "There she is singing, and there I am giving with the trumpet, and all of a great big sudden—whammo!—it hits me, and I feel a funny feeling in my stomach, like maybe it is full of supersuds or something, and my mouth is dry just like cotton candy.

"Indigestion," I suggest.

He shakes his big head. "No," he says, "it is worse than indigestion." He points to his stomach and sighs. "It is love."

"Fine," I say, happy it is not worse. "All you got to do is tell her, get married and have lots and lots of kids."

Hotlips Grogan's big eyebrows play hopscotch around his button nose, so I can tell he does not think I solve all his troubles with my suggestion.

"You are a good man, Eddie," he tells me, "but you are too intellectual. This is an affair of the heart." He sighs again. "I am never in love of a girl before," he goes on, more worried, "and I do not know how to act. Besides, the thrush is with us only a day, and Frankie already is making with the eyes."

"So what should I do, give you lessons?" The idea is so laughable I laugh at it. "Anyway, Frankie always makes with the eyes at thrushes."

"Yes," Hotlips Grogan admits, "but never before have I been in love of any of the thrushes Frankie has made with the eyes at. Frankly, Eddie, I am worried like all get out about this."

"Sometimes I do not even understand the way you play even before the thrush comes, Hotlips," I admit. "Like for instance yesterday when

we play 'A Spaceship Built for Two.' This is a song, as you know, that does not have in it many high notes, but even when you play the low notes they sound somewhat like they maybe are trying to be high notes. It is a matter which is perplexing to one of my curious nature."

Hotlips looks sheepish for a minute and then he says, "It is a physical disability with me, Eddie. When I am young and practicing with my trumpet one day, I have an accident and get my tongue caught in the mouthpiece, and it is necessary for the doctor to operate on my tongue and cut into it like maybe it is chopped liver."

"I am sorry to hear this, Hotlips," I say.

"I do not tell anyone this before, Eddie," Hotlips confesses. "But afterward when I play the trumpet, I play two notes at one time, which at first is pretty embarrassing."

"This is great, Hotlips," I proclaim as a big idea hits me; "you can play your own harmony. With talent like that, and my brain—"

But Hotlips is shaking his head. "No, Eddie," he says. "The other note is way off in the stratosphere someplace and no one can hear it, even when the melody note is low. And the higher the note is you can hear, the higher the other note is you cannot hear. Besides, now I cannot even play what I am supposed to play, what with the thrush around."

I sit there with my beer in my hand and think about it for awhile, while Hotlips looks at me like a lost sheepdog. I scratch my head but I do not even come up with dandruff.

Finally, I say, "Well, thrush or not, if you play no better than you do this afternoon, Frankie will make you walk back home without a spacesuit."

"That is for positive," Hotlips agrees sadly. "So what can I do?"

I am forced to admit that I do not know just what Hotlips can do. "However," I say, "I have an idea." And I call Mamie over and tell her the problem. "So you are a woman and maybe you know what my musician friend can do," I suggest.

Mamie sighs. "I am at a loss for words concerning what your friend can do, but I know just how he feels, for it is like that with me, too. I am in love of a handsome young musician who comes in here, but he does not take notice of me, except to order some beer for him and his friend."

I click my teeth sympathetically at this news.

"And I am too shy and dignified a girl to tell him," Mamie continues sadly. "So you see I have the same problem as your friend and cannot help you."

"See," I whisper to Hotlips, "it is perfectly normal."

"Yes," he hisses back. "But I am still miserable, and the only company I desire is that of Stella Starlight."

"Maybe it really is your trum-

pet," I suggest, not very hopeful, though.

Hotlips shakes his head. "Look," he says and takes the trumpet from his case and puts it to his lips, "and listen to this."

Inwardly, I quiver like all get out, because I figure that is just what the management will tell us to do, once Hotlips lets go. Hotlips puffs out his cheeks and a soft note slides from the end of the trumpet —low, clear, and beautiful, without a waver in a spaceload. Only a few people close by can hear the note and they do not pay us any attention, except to think that maybe we are a little nuttier than is normal for musicians.

From his first note, Hotlips shifts to a higher note which is just as pretty. Then he goes on to another one and then to another, improvising a melody I do not hear before and getting higher all the time. After awhile I can hardly hear it, it is so high, but I can feel the glass in my hand vibrating like it wants to get out on the floor and dance. I hold on to it with both hands, so my beer will not slosh over the side. Then there is no sound at all from the trumpet, but Hotlips' cheeks are puffed out and he is still blowing for all he is worth—which is plenty, if he can play like this when Stella Starlight is around.

I tap Hotlips on the shoulder. "Hotlips, that is all very well for any bats in the room which maybe can hear what you play, but—" He does not pay me any attention.

Suddenly there is a large crinkle-crash of glass from the bar and a hoarse cry from the bartender as he sees his king-size mirror come down in little pieces. At the same time, glasses pop into fragments all over the room and spill beer over the people holding them. Even my own glass becomes nothing but ground glass and the beer sloshes over the table. At the moment, however, I do not worry about that.

There are other things to worry about which are more important—like Hotlips' and my health, for instance, which is not likely to be so good in the near future.

Like I say, Hotlips does not play loud and it is noisy in the place, so there are not too many who hear him. But they look around, all mad and covered with beer, and see him there with the trumpet in his hand and a funny look on his big face, and they put two and two together. I can see they figure the answer is four. And what makes things worse, they are between us and the front door, so we cannot sneak past like maybe we are just tourists.

"Hotlips," I say to him, my voice not calm like is usual, "I think it is a grand and glorious idea that we desert here and take ourselves elsewhere."

Hotlips agrees. "But where?" he wants to know.

I am forced to admit to myself that he comes up with a good question.

"Over here," Mamie said suddenly, and we look across the room

to see her poking her nose through a side door.

We do not wait for a formal invite but zoom across the floor and through the door into another, emptier room. Mamie slams the door and locks it just as two or three bodies thump into it like they mean business.

"The manager is out there and is not completely overjoyed with your actions of a short while ago," Mamie informs us, explaining, "I recognize the thump the character makes."

"Evidently," I surmise, "he is in no mood to talk to concerning damages and how we can get out of paying them, so we will talk to him later instead of now."

"See what I mean, though, Eddie," Hotlips says. "I play fine when Stella Starlight is not in the place. Like I say, it is love and what can I do about it."

"It is a problem," I say. "Even if you *do* play, you will no doubt be fired and cannot pay for the damages to the bar room and to the customers' clothing." Already there are holes in my plastic clothing where the beer splashes. "If you can only give out on the *Saturn* like you play here," I sigh, "we can break all records and show Frankie—"

Suddenly Mamie is tugging at my arm.

"Mamie," I inquire politely of her, "why are you tugging at my arm?"

"That is it," she informs me and leans forward and whispers in my ear.

"But—" I say.

"Hurry," she says, pushing us out another door. "You have only got this afternoon to do it."

"But—" I say again, and Hotlips and I are in the alley looking at the door which Mamie closes in our face.

"What does Mamie say?" Hotlips wants to know eagerly. "Can she fix it up with me and Stella Starlight?"

I scratch my head. "That I do not know, Hotlips, but she does give me an idea which is so good I am surprised at myself I do not think of it alone."

Hotlips gives me a blank stare. "Which is?"

"Come on," I say mysteriously. "You and me have got things to do."

It is hard to say who is more nervous that night, Hotlips or a certain piano player with my name. Frankie is smirking like always, and Stella Starlight is sitting and looking beautiful while she waits for her cue. Hotlips is fumbling with his trumpet like maybe he never sees one before. And I—even I am not exactly calm like always.

The band begins to warm up, but we do not knock ourselves out because there are still no customers to speak of. Frankie's license makes it plain that he has to stay over the western hemisphere so he has to wait until it gets dark enough there for the people to want to go night-

clubbing, even though it is not really night on the *Saturn,* or morning or anything else.

We play along like always, and Hotlips has his trumpet pressed into his face, and nothing but beautiful sounds come from the band. I do not know if Frankie is altogether happy about this, for he does not like Hotlips and would like this chance to bounce him. But what surprises me most is that the thrush, Stella Starlight, keeps looking back at Hotlips like she notices him for the first time and is plenty worried by what she sees.

We have a short break after awhile and I am telling Hotlips that the idea goes over real great, when Stella Starlight waltzes over. Hotlips' big eyes bug out and I can see him shaking and covered with goosebumps.

"You do not play like that before, Hotlips," she coos. "What did you do?"

Hotlips blushes and stammers, "Eddie and I fix—" But I give him a kick in his big shins before he gives the whole thing away.

"Hotlips does some practicing this afternoon," I tell her, "to get his lip in shape for tonight."

She looks at me like she is looking through me, and then she turns back to Hotlips and says, soft and murmuring: "Please do not play too high, Hotlips. I am delicate and am disturbed by high sounds."

She waltzes away, and I scratch my head and try to figure out what this pitch is for. Hotlips is not trying to figure out anything; he just sits there looking like he has just got his trumpet out of hock for the last time.

"Hotlips," I say to him.

"Go away, please, Eddie," he tells me. "I am in heaven."

"You will be in the poorhouse or maybe even in jail if you tell somebody how we fix your playing," I warn him.

"I still feel funny feelings though, Eddie," he tells me, frowning, "like I cannot hit high notes now if I try."

"Then do not try," I advise. "One problem at a time is too much."

There is a commotion at the entrance on the other side of the dancefloor, where some people all dressed up come in. A woman is holding her head and moaning and threatening to faint all over the place.

Frankie hurries over to us, running fidgety hands through his hair. "For goodness sake, play something," he almost begs.

"What gives?" I inquire.

"Flying cuspidors," Frankie says in a frantic tone. "They are all around the place, like they are maybe mad at something, and a few minutes ago they buzz the ferry and get the passengers all nervous and upset. If they do that again, business will be bad; maybe even now it will be bad. Play something!"

He hops out in front with his baton and gives us a quick one-two, and we all swing into "Space On

My Hands," real loud so as to get people's minds off things which Frankie wants to get people's minds off of.

Stella Starlight gets up to sing, but she looks more like she would rather do something else. She stares at Hotlips and at the trumpet on his lips and begins to quiver like she is about to do a dance.

I remember she says she does not like high notes, and this song has some pretty well up in the stratosphere, especially for the trumpet section, which is Hotlips.

She is frowning like maybe she is thinking real hard about something and is surprised her thoughts do no good. Her face becomes waxy and there is a frightened look on it.

She quivers some more, as the notes go up and up and up. Then she lets out a shriek, like maybe she is going to pieces.

And then she does. Actually.

Right before our popping eyeballs she goes to pieces.

As each one in the band sees what is going on, he stops playing, until finally Hotlips is the only one. But the trumpet is in Hotlips' hand, and the music is coming from the recording machine we place under his chair. The notes are clear and smooth, and you can almost feel the air shaking with them.

But nobody notices the music or where it comes from. They are too busy watching the thrush, Stella Starlight.

She stands there, her face as white as clay, shaking like a carrot going through a mixmaster. And then tiny cracks appear on her face, on her arms, even in her dress, and then a large one appears in her forehead and goes down through her body. She splits in the middle like a cracked walnut, and there in the center, floating three feet from the floor is a small flying cuspidor.

Nobody in the room says anything. They just stand there, bug-eyed and frightened like anything. Somewhere, across the room, a woman faints. I do not feel too well myself, and I am afraid to look to see how Hotlips takes this.

There is no sound, but I hear a voice in my mind and know that the others hear it too. The voice sounds like it is filled with wire and metal and is not exactly human. It says:

"You win, Hotlips Grogan. I, as advance agent in disguise, tell you this. We will go away and leave you and your people alone. We place a mental block in your mind, but you outsmart us, and now you know our weakness. We cannot stand high sounds which you can play so easy on your trumpet. We find ourselves a home someplace else."

With that, the cuspidor shoots across the room and plows right through the wall.

"That's the engine room!" Frankie wails.

There is a sudden explosion from the other side of the wall, and everybody decides all at once they would like to be someplace else, and they all pick the same spot. The space ferry is pretty crowded, but

we jam aboard it and drift away from the *Saturn*—musicians, waiters and paying customers all sitting in each other's laps.

The *Saturn* is wobbling around, with flames shooting out at all angles, and Frankie is holding his head and moaning. In the distance, you can just about make out little specks of cuspidors heading for the wild black yonder.

So all is well that ends well, and this is it.

Frankie uses his insurance money to open a rest home on Mars for ailing musicians.

Hotlips is all broken up, in a manner of speaking, over Stella Starlight's turning out to be not human, but he consoles himself with a good job playing trumpet in a burlesque house where the girls wear costumes made of glass and other brittle stuff.

As for me, Mamie gets me a job playing piano at the place where she works, and everything is okay except for one thing. When Mamie is around I cannot seem to concentrate on my playing. I feel a funny feeling in my stomach, like maybe it is full of supersuds or something, and my mouth is dry like cotton candy.

I think maybe it is indigestion.

NEXT MONTH—



LESTER DEL REY
begins a new series of articles on the problems of the Space Age, with—
COLLISION ORBIT

IVAN T. SANDERSON
raises some startling possibilities in his latest article—
MAN-MADE UFO

J. F. BONE
describes the rise of a fantastic new Empire in his unusual story—
THE SWORD

CIVILIAN SAUCER INTELLIGENCE
turns an analytical eye on the writings of Papa Fort, in—
SHAPES IN THE SKY

and

DAMON KNIGHT
describes a situation another century would have called *possession by the Devil,*
in his complete new novel— **BE MY GUEST**

—in *FANTASTIC UNIVERSE*

the amazing mrs. mimms

by . . . David C. Knight

THERE was a muffled rushing noise and the faintly acrid smell of ion electrodes as the Time Translator deposited Mrs. Mimms back into the year 1958. Being used to such journeys, she looked calmly about with quick gray eyes, making little flicking gestures with her hands as if brushing the stray minutes and seconds from her plain brown coat.

The scene of Mrs. Mimms' arrival in the past was the rear of a large supermarket, more specifically between two packing cases which had once contained breakfast foods. The excursion through time had evidently been a smooth one for the smile had not once left Mrs. Mimms' rotund countenance during the intervening centuries.

Two heavy black suitcases appeared to be the lady's only luggage accompanying her from the future. These she picked up with a sharp gasp and made her way to the front of the shopping center around which slick new apartment buildings formed a horseshoe.

Mrs. Mimms was, as usual, on another assignment for Destiny-workers, Inc.

It was early evening at the Green-

Tea had a wonderful effect on her. Sipping it slowly, she felt the strength returning to her tired system.

"Long may the good lady serve us poor folks in the dim past," writes the author, who will be remembered for his THE LOVE OF FRANK NINETEEN *(Dec. 1957) and who feels that much of SF "misses" because it lacks the human angle. "I believe you can have gimmicks* and *human interest too," he writes.*

lawn Apartments, a time supposedly of contentment, yet Mrs. Mimms was quick to sense the disturbing vibrations in the warm air. She pressed through the crowds entering and leaving the supermarket. A faint mustache of perspiration formed on her upper lip. No one offered to help her with the bags. With a professional eye Mrs. Mimms noted the drawn mouths, the tense expressions typical of the Time Zone and shook her head. Central as usual had not been wrong; the Briefing Officer himself had cautioned her on what poor shape the Zonal area was in.

Jostling Mrs. Mimms on all sides were mostly young men and women accompanied by energetic, wriggling children of varying ages. It saddened Mrs. Mimms to see the premature lines forming in the youthful mothers' foreheads, and the gray settling too quickly into the men's hair. Mrs. Mimms, who considered herself not quite in the twilight of middle age, was just 107 that month.

Outbursts of juvenile and adult temper grated harshly in the Destinyworker's ears. She witnessed a resounding slap and a child's cry of pain. A young mother was shouting angrily: "Couldn't *you* have kept an eye on her? Do I have to watch her every minute?"

Mrs. Mimms hurried swiftly on for there was much she had to do. Then she stopped abruptly before a small delicatessen. She entered and gave the clerk her order:

"One package of Orange Pekoe Tea, if you please. Tea *leaves,* not bags."

There were definite advantages, thought Mrs. Mimms, in being assigned to any century preceding the Twenty-Third. Due to the increasing use of synthetic products in Mrs. Mimms' home-century the tea plant, among other vegetation, had been allowed to become extinct. Ever since Mrs. Mimms' solo assignment to Eighteenth Century England, she had grown exceedingly fond of the beverage.

Ten minutes later Mrs. Mimms, one of Destinyworkers' best Certified Priority Operators, reached the Renting Office of the Greenlawn Apartments. "I do hope the Superintendent is still on duty," panted Mrs. Mimms, setting her bags down very carefully. "If the Research Department is correct—and it usually is—his hours are from 9 to 6:30."

It was one minute past 6:30 when Mrs. Mimms knocked.

"Yeah?" boomed a disgruntled voice. "Come on in. It ain't locked."

"Good evening," said Mrs. Mimms to a young man in work clothes seated behind a paper-strewn desk. "I hope it's not too late for you to show me an apartment tonight. It needn't be large. Two or three rooms will do nicely. However, I have one stipulation."

"We aim to please at Greenlawn, Ma'm—within reason—you understand."

"I understand," replied the Destinyworker. "It is merely that the

apartment should, as far as possible, be located in the central part of the building and on a middle floor—not too high or too low."

"No problem there," said the super, consulting a board from which hung a number of keys. "Most of 'em want just the opposite—corner apartments, views, top floor, Southern exposure. Here's one. Partly furnished. Young couple left for Europe. They want to sublet for the rest of the lease."

"I hope the rent is reasonable."

It was. Mrs. Mimms received the news with apparent relief. Due to the high cost of Time Translation and maintenance of workers in other Zones, Destinyworkers, Inc., a non-profit organization, had to keep its overhead at a minimum.

"This will do very nicely," Mrs. Mimms announced after inspecting the apartment. "I should like to move in at once." The superintendent then brought up his new tenant's suitcases, commented upon their weight, obtained Mrs. Mimms' signature on the preliminary lease and left.

Even for younger Destinyworkers, time travel at best was an exhausting business. The bags *had* been heavy, and Zonal Speech Compliance was always a strain at the outset of an assignment. Mrs. Mimms needed refreshment. Finding a battered pot and a broken cup abandoned by the former tenants, she heated water on the range and made herself some hot tea. Sipping it slowly Mrs. Mimms felt the strength returning to her tired system.

Having eaten an early dinner in the future Mrs. Mimms was not hungry. The tea would be sufficient until tomorrow. She washed the cup carefully, put away the pot and then unlocked one of her black suitcases. From it she extracted a small white card on which there was some printing and a phone number at the bottom. Mrs. Mimms checked the phone number with the telephone in her new apartment; they were the same. Research was almost *never* wrong. Mrs. Mimms then took the card down to the main floor and attached it to a bulletin borad with four thumbtacks. The message read:

Mrs. Althea Mimms

Professional Companion & Babysitter
Rates Reasonable

Back in her apartment, the time traveler opened the other suitcase. It contained a batch of weird-looking apparatus which faintly resembled a television set, although there were twice the number of dials and knobs. To the uninitiated eye the legends under them would have been perplexing—"Month Selector," "Reverse Day Fast-Forward," "Weekometer," "Minute - Second Divider." To Mrs. Mimms however the instrument was simply standard equipment for all assignments. She placed it carefully on the desk in her living room and, one by one, drew out the five sensitive antennae from their sockets. Mrs. Mimms

did not need to use the electrical outlet under the desk for new d-c ion batteries had been installed whose combined guaranteed life was five years.

It had grown somewhat late at Greenlawn—the hands of Mrs. Mimms' watch were nearing eleven —yet this did not deter her from flicking the power on. She dialed to a position a few hours before on that same evening and waited for the equipment to warm up. A roar of angry static and strident voices suddenly filled the room until Mrs. Mimms quickly cut the volume. The outburst was definitely an indication that her work was cut out for her. Eyeing the red pilot indicator across which a ribbon of names was flashing she slowly twirled the Master Selector. Images flickered and disappeared on the screen; then suddenly Mrs. Mimms leaned forward anxiously. A living room much like her own came into view and in it a man and a woman faced each other menacingly. The pilot was flashing the name Randolph, Apt. 14-B.

Reducing the volume slightly, Mrs. Mimms listened:

"You don't care, Bill Randolph. If you cared we could be out somewhere right now. My God, it's Saturday night. I'll bet the Bairds and Simmons are at a show right now. But not us. Oh, no. Honestly, I don't think you'd stir out of that chair if it weren't for your meals and the office."

"You're a great one to talk," snapped the young man. "Every time we decide to line something up you get finicky about a sitter. How many times have we sat for Ruth Whatshername? And we're up at Ellen Fox's a couple of nights, too. Then our kid comes down with a cold or something and they're not good enough. No wonder we never get out."

"Can I help it if Kenny takes after *your* side of the family? You and your mother are always coming down with something. He's *sensitive*. I won't have some other woman taking care of my child when he needs my attention. And I *won't* have these teenage girls for Kenneth with their boyfriends lolling all over the sofa. I wouldn't have an easy minute while we were away. Anyway, when we *do* get out I don't notice you bending over backwards to get tickets for anything decent. It's always something *you* want to see. Those silly Marilyn Monroe movies, for instance."

"What's wrong with Marilyn Monroe? I wouldn't *mind* being nagged by *her*."

"I see," choked the young woman, biting her lip. "Thank you very much. Of course it's perfectly *OK* when something is wrong with every other meal I cook. It's *fine* when Your Majesty doesn't like the dress I've got on or the way I have my hair."

Mrs. Randolph's rising voice elicited a child's cry from the rear of the apartment. Both parents stiffened.

"Go ahead, say it, say it was *me* who woke him up this time," bleated Randolph. He quickly snapped a newspaper up between himself and his wife.

Mrs. Mimms cut the picture and erased the name from the pilot indicator. The case was a typical one, routine in fact; yet it was the first one of the assignment and Mrs. Mimms was moved to expedite it. She picked up the telephone and placed a call to nearby New York City. The party answered promptly.

"Althea! How nice. I didn't know you were in the Twentieth again. What can I do for you?"

"You can arrange some entertainment for me, George. Something good. For two."

Mrs. Mimms held the phone for a minute. Presently the conversation resumed as the voice of George Kahn, Resident Destinyworker, came over the wire.

"Sorry to be so long, Althea, it took some managing. I've got you two in the orchestra for 'My Fair Lady' on the 28th. That's the best of the current crop. Nice little thing, it'll be running for another four years of course. Ought to catch it yourself some night."

"I'd love to, George, but I shan't have time. Not the way this assignment's developing. You know what to do with the tickets."

Mrs. Mimms replaced the telephone in its cradle and turned again to the Master Selector. Among the kaleidoscope of voices and figures not all were scenes of frustration and discontent. Yet enough of them were so that Mrs. Mimms was seriously disturbed. Then again, the apparatus had its indiscriminate faults: at one scene Mrs. Mimms blushed deeply and flicked the dial to another setting. Suddenly she was surprised to hear a familiar voice. The pilot monitor showed that it was the apartment of the building superintendent.

"It ain't right. You know it ain't right," the super was saying. He was sunk deep into an overstuffed chair and there was a can of beer at his elbow. "No wonder the kids're getting lousy report cards. The minute they get home from school they park in front of the TV. By the time they're ready for supper they're so excited watching Indians and cowboys and Foreign Legion stuff they can't eat. Afterwards they are too knocked out to do their homework."

"Don't I know it," said his wife. "But you can't forbid them because all the other kids are allowed to watch the same things. Adele Jones down the hall says she has the same trouble. They tried taking Brian's TV away and the kid put up such a fuss they gave it back just to get some peace."

The super took a swallow of beer and tapped one of the report cards in disgust.

"Look at that. Charlotte gets a 'D' in Reading. Goddam it, she's a smart enough kid. I can't remember when's the last time I saw *either* of them bring a book back from

the library. Hell, they're too busy worrying about how Sergeant Prestons' going to come out."

"You'd think they'd have more educational stuff on TV."

"I may be only a superintendent," growled the super, "but, by God, those kids are going to college. They're gonna have opportunities I never had. Sometimes I got a good mind to kick a hole right through that 21" screen."

"Aw, Chuck, honey, take it easy. You're the best super this building ever had. I got me a real sweet guy, even if he isn't no college graduate."

"I ain't no Biff Baker or Captain Video, either. Maybe if I was the kids could watch me and we could dump the TV set."

Mrs. Mimms dimmed the screen and recorded the problem briefly in a notebook marked ACTIVE. This too was a common enough complaint of the Time Zone. Mrs. Mimms rummaged about in one of the suitcases until she produced a brightly colored box. Inside the box were a number of objects resembling radio condensers with small metal clamps at either end. Mrs. Mimms removed one and read the label: FILTER XC8794, Reading. *Caution: for best results attach to TV aerial. Lasts 2 weeks only. Destroy label before using.*

"I *do* hope the superintendent's set doesn't have rabbits' ears," said Mrs. Mimms, dialing the super's apartment again to check. "Hooking these up to a regular aerial is so much easier." The superintendent's set luckily had an outside antenna and by manipulating certain dials, the Destinyworker traced it out and up to the roof. Pressing a button marked TRACER LIGHT, she left the set in operation and made her way up to the top floor of the apartment house. Taking the fire exit to the roof, Mrs. Mimms found herself among a forest of TV aerials. However there was a small circle of light cast about one of them and she went to it and attached the filter.

Returning to her apartment, Mrs. Mimms went immediately to bed. She would have liked a last cup of tea before retiring, but she was too tired to fix it.

The telephone woke the time traveler at half past ten the next morning. She answered it sleepily. It was a young mother, Mrs. Mimms' first customer. Could Mrs. Mimms *possibly* come that night? The voice sounded desperate, then relieved when Mrs. Mimms answered Yes, she would be there.

Remembering that she had had nothing to eat since her own century, Mrs. Mimms hurried below to the delicatessen and purchased some Danish pastry. She looked forward to a cup of strong tea. As she waited for the water to boil, she switched on the apparatus and dialed once or twice across the band. At that hour most of the apartments were silent. Wives were attending to cleaning or washing and the children had been sent out to play.

Leaving the apparatus for a minute, Mrs. Mimms made her tea. When she returned there was a burst of static on the loudspeaker, then a loud childish voice and images took shape on the screen.

"I'm captain of this spaceship, Ronnie Smith," insisted the taller of the two youngsters. "You gotta do like I say. We're the first guys on this planet, see? We got cut off from the ship by the monsters and we only got another half hour of oxygen left. We gotta shoot our way back. Let's go, Lieutenant Smith."

"Ah, you're always the captain," muttered Lt. Smith mutinously, though inaudibly under his F.A.O. Schwartz plastic helmet. The two Earthlings advanced cautiously across the parking lot in the rear of the apartment building, mowing down the aliens like flies with their atomic ray guns.

"Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah. See me get that one, Smith?" screamed the captain murderously. "Right in the belly, look at the guts. Ah-ah-ah-ah. Big spiders, about twenty feet tall. There's some more. Make every shot count, Smith. We gotta make the ship before they do."

"I just blasted five of 'em with one shot," bragged Lt. Smith, leveling his pistol at a particularly large alien and watching it dissolve.

Fighting their way desperately across the parking lot the spacemen finally made the Smith family car in safety. "Blast off immediately, Lt. Smith," ordered the captain. The rocket wavered for a minute and rose. "Wait a minute, Smith. I seen Rocky Morgan do this once in a comic book. No member of the Space Patrol lets an alien get away alive. We got to kill 'em all. Head back and we'll get the rest of 'em with the hydrogen artillery." Accordingly the ship swept low over the strange planet. "Ah-ah-ah-ah." Twin sheets of imaginary flame burst from the rocket and the remainder of the faltering spider-monsters perished horribly.

Shaking her head, Mrs. Mimms spun the Master Selector until the screen went blank. An avid space traveler herself (she was especially fond of a nice Lunar trip at vacation time), the negative implications of this childish violence had a depressing effect on Mrs. Mimms. She noted the incident down in her notebook and starred it for special attention.

Like any woman in any century, Mrs. Mimms had an infallible remedy for cheering herself up. She went shopping. By economizing on her expense account she found it possible to afford a tiny luxury now and then. Mrs. Mimms bought a badly needed blouse and some facial cream. She also bought some groceries and a newspaper. After a modest meal, she found that she had an hour before her babysitting assignment. Opening the newspaper to the sports page, she indulged in one of the amusements common among Certified Priority Operators. Glancing down the list of tomor-

row's daily-double she checked the names of horses to win, place and show. Mrs. Mimms made her selections merely by the sound of the names. She then turned a knob marked Tomorrow and dialed about with the Master Selector until the image of a man reading a newspaper appeared on the screen. She waited until he turned to the sports page before seeing how she had done. She had done poorly. Only one winner out of seven races. Of course, using the Destiny apparatus itself for personal gain was a violation of the Direct Influencing of Personal Fate Clause and was sufficient reason for losing her CPO ticket.

When Mrs. Mimms returned from babysitting it was after midnight. A cup of tea at her elbow, she sat down before the screen. There was a party just breaking up in the far building. Some people above her were watching the late show on TV. A couple on her own floor were arguing about money but the argument seemed to be nearly over and Mrs. Mimms did not intrude further. Suddenly the pilot marked URGENT started flashing and the blurs on the screen sharpened into a young man and woman seated across from each other in the apartment where the party had been. Half-finished drinks and ash trays full of stubs lay about. Husband and wife were both slightly drunk and being very frank with each other.

"I don't know how we got off on *this,*" remarked the man. "Whenever George gets a couple of drinks in him he starts popping off about politics and the fate of the world. He doesn't know a damn thing about either."

"Well, at least he's optimistic," the young woman said, kicking off her shoes.

"You can say that again! Fifty years from now, according to George, we'll all be living in plastic houses with three helicopters in each garage. There won't be any unemployment, we'll have a four-day week, atomic energy'll be doing all the heavy work, mankind'll have realized the futility of war, everything'll be just hunky-dory. Nuts! Guys like George make me sick."

"But good Lord, honey, if everyone felt like you there wouldn't *be* any world. Maybe things won't be perfect but life's got to go on."

"Go on to what?" muttered the husband, polishing off his watery highball. "—To a great big beautiful cloud of atomic fallout, that's what. Don't laugh either, because everything points that way and you know it. Sputniks and ICBMs zooming around, both sides stockpiling like crazy, half the world scrapping as it is. It's just a question of who tosses the first match and then blooie! Hell, Julie, it's not that I don't *want* another kid. It's just that I don't think it's fair to create human life and turn it loose in this—this holocaust."

The young woman got up and sat on the arm of his chair and

stroked his hair. "Oh Bill, honey, it's *wrong* to think like that. Don't you see how wrong it is?" Suddenly she wrinkled her nose at him and whispered some words in his ear. They were in the special baby-language which had sprung up around the first child.

Then she said tipsily: "A baby is such a tiny thing."

"Yeah," said her husband, "you feed them and take care of them and watch them grow and it's swell. Just like the fatted calf. Then you flip open the evening paper and wonder whether they'll have the good luck to die in their beds at a ripe old age. I tell you I'm honestly frightened of where we're going . . ."

There were tense little crow's feet about Mrs. Mimms' eyes as she cleared the screen. She reached immediately for the telephone and dialed a number. A couple of seconds later the Resident Destinyworker's voice said, "Hello?"

"George, this is Althea. I'm sorry to be calling so late but I have a Condition Twelve case."

George Kahn's voice was instantly alert. "Male?"

"Yes, and a good Third Intensity. Here are the coordinates if you want to rerun it yourself." Mrs. Mimms read some figures off the dials. "I'm authorized a week's night-teleportation but I only have the standard equipment of course. You have the Viele apparatus over there, haven't you?"

"Yes, but frankly, Althea, even with the Viele we're limited in what we can do. I don't have to tell you that's getting pretty close to Direct Influence. I tampered with it myself a couple of years ago and got a stiff reprimand from Central."

"But, George, this is a *Twelve.* A serious one. The files at Central are full of Anti-Population Projectographs. All that might-have-been talent that's lost in every Time Zone! Think what might have happened if we hadn't interfered in the Voltaire case! Why we might even have lost Darwin himself if Mr. Wentworth hadn't insisted on three nights of the Viele for Darwin's parents."

"Well, yes," admitted the Resident Destinyworker. "All right, Althea, I'll give him a week's dream kinesis if you insist but just remember the Sophistication Curve in the Twentieth. You'll probably have to supplement it with some work of your own."

"Thank you George, I will."

"And Althea—"

"Yes?"

"You sound tired. Get a good night's rest. The Mid-Twentieth's a tough Zone and the Chief would not want one of his best CPO's taking on more than she can handle. Personally, I think you ought to ask him for a nice soft assignment in the Future Division next trip."

Mrs. Mimms smiled. "I'll leave the glamor to the youngsters, George, they're much better at it.

Besides," she added, "there isn't any tea there."

Again, Mrs. Mimms would have liked a cup, but she was much too tired to prepare it.

Three weeks after Mrs. Mimms' arrival at the Greenlawn Apartments, the superintendent was repairing a leaky faucet on the top floor. The housewife watched him as he gave the nut a final twist with his wrench and stood up.

"Thanks for coming up and looking at it so soon, Mr. Seely," she said. "How are Mrs. Seely and the children?"

"Good Mrs. Dorne, real good, thanks. Especially the kids after that new TV show came on."

"Oh?" said Mrs. Dorne. "Which one is that?"

"It ain't on no more," said the super, "but, boy, while it lasted the kids sure got a kick out of it. That little Charlotte of mine, she's going to be a real egghead."

"Well what kind of a show was it?"

"Reading," said the super. "Just reading. I ain't sure what they called it, but I know there wasn't no sponsor. Maybe that's why it lasted only two weeks or so. Some kind of test show I guess it was."

"I guess we missed it listening to something else. What channel was it on?"

"Now that you mention it I'm darned if I remember," Chuck Seely said. "The kids just come home from school one night and parked in front of the TV like always and instead of the westerns and like that here's this guy, just reading. It lasted about an hour every night, we couldn't drag the kids away. Me and the wife got in the habit watching it too."

"Was it Charles Laughton? He has a reading program."

"It wasn't him. I never saw the guy before, but what a voice! No commercials, no scenery, no nothin' except this guy reading. Something different every night, too. Stuff like Dickens and famous writers like that. I never heard a voice like this guy had, you couldn't stop listening. Then you know what he'd do at the end of the show?"

"What?"

"He'd tell the kids to go get a pencil and write down the names of more books to get at the library. And you know what? The kids *do* it. That Charlotte, the other night she brings home some Shakespeare stories for kids by a guy named Lamb. She makes me read 'em to her, too. Get a load 'o me reading Shakespeare. I got to admit they're pretty good stories. That Charlotte's going to be a real egghead."

"We usually have our TV on around supper time. It's funny we missed it."

"I checked TV Guide but it was not listed," said the super. "It was some kind of test show. I guess this guy couldn't find a sponsor."

A week after this incident Betty Randolph picked up the telephone

and said, "Hello?" It was Dot on the ground floor. Ed had phoned earlier and said he'd be a little late. Betty felt relaxed and just in the mood for some woman talk.

"Dot, you'll never guess where we were last night," she said. "We saw My Fair Lady, imagine! Don't you envy me?"

There was a gasp at the other end of the line. "Betty Randolph, you didn't! We've been on the waiting list for six months. Where in the world did you get tickets?"

"That's the weird part of it. A messenger just delivered them to Ed in the office one morning. They were in a plain envelope marked 'Mr. Randolph' and a card inside said 'Hope you enjoy them—George.' Ed thinks the messenger made a mistake and got the wrong building or something because Ed's the only Randolph there. Anyway, by the time Ed opened the envelope the messenger was gone. There wasn't anything to do but use the tickets of course."

"Of all the luck! Maybe you and Ed've got a fairy Godmother or something. What'd you do for a sitter?"

"Oh, we were nearly insane finding one. Jane and Tina were busy and we knew you were away for the weekend. Fortunately we phoned this Mrs. Mimms and she was available. Kenneth *loved* her."

"Isn't she *nice?* That woman's a wonder with children. Dicky and Sue are as good as gold when she's around and she always seems to be free when you want her. She's so cheap, too, I don't see how the woman lives."

"Glory we had a good time!" sighed Betty. "We had drinks and filet mignon at a nice little place near the theater and forgot all about kids for a while. It was like going on a date again. I had on my red-and-gold dress I haven't worn for months and Ed kept telling me how cute I looked . . ."

"Zoom, zoom," the captain kept saying. The spaceship swooped in for a landing on the crimson Martian sands. Captain Bobby Taylor took up a position before the air-lock and briefed his second-in-command, Ronnie Smith. "We're surrounded by enemy aliens, Smith," announced Captain Taylor. "Better break out the death-ray pistols. Our mission is to destroy every metal monster on this planet. Look at 'em come! They got eight legs and sixteen wire arms . . ."

"Ah, cut it out, Bobby. I ain't playing science-fiction with you any more. It ain't like you say at all."

"What's it like then, wise guy? I suppose *you* been to Mars."

"Maybe I ain't," said Lt. Smith. "Anyways I know somebody that *has.*"

"Yeah? Who?"

"Mrs. Mimms. She babysits with me when Mom and Dad go out. She's been all over in space. Venus and all them other planets. She says there ain't any monsters on any of 'em. There ain't *nuthin* on Mars

except a little bitty grass and a lot of scientists from Earth."

"Mad scientists?" asked Captain Taylor hopefully.

"Nah, just scientists. She says we oughta forget about monsters and play the right way. You know, like with atomic reactors and radar communication and growing new kinds of food for Earth colonies."

"Ah I don't believe it. She'd hafta be from someplace in the future. She'd hafta come here by time machine or something, wouldn't she?"

"That's what she did," Lt. Smith informed the captain. "She showed me pictures to prove it. Pictures of her last vacation on the moon. You oughta see what they done to the place. She's from the future, all right."

"Then she ain't supposed to tell anybody about it, is she?"

Lt. Smith waved his hand airily. "She says it's OK to tell kids because grownups wouldn't believe it anyway. Get your mother to let her sit for you next time. She'll show you the pictures if you ask her. Heck, it's no fun playing monsters now."

"Well, look," said Captain Taylor magnanimously, "supposing I let you be Captain today. You can pretend any kind of stuff you want."

"OK," said the new Captain, and immediately postulated a gigantic atomic reactor on the planet Pluto.

The doctor had said Julie should not, but she had another cup of coffee anyway. She drank it and then lit a cigarette. Immediately she felt a twinge of the morning sickness and wisely snubbed it out in the ashtray. She was so happy it almost didn't hurt at all. I'm pregnant again, she thought, that's the important thing. Julie hugged herself and thought again of Mrs. Mimms and her tea leaves. It was the silliest thing, she told herself, you didn't base important decisions on tea leaves. Not *tea* leaves. It was right after the week Bill had been having those queer dreams that they'd decided, well, to go ahead. Julie remembered Bill's face as he sat on the edge of her bed describing one of the dreams to her as she laid there.

"It was vivid as hell, honey," Bill had said. "Maybe I ought to give up eating cheese sandwiches at night or something. It's like dreaming on the installment plan. Every time I'm someplace different and some guy in a weird suit is showing me around. Last night I could swear it was somewhere in New York, only the buildings were a lot taller and there were kind of triple-decker ramp things with nutty-looking cars on them and the people all wore tight-fitting clothes. Then all of a sudden we were down on what looked like the Battery and the guy showed me a big cookie-shaped thing out in the harbor with planes that looked like flying saucers landing and taking off from it. Hell, maybe it's going to be George Humphry's kind of world after all

a couple of hundred years from now."

Then a night or two later they'd gone out to a movie. She'd been lucky to get Mrs. Mimms to sit with Georgie. After they got back Mrs. Mimms had made some tea —*real* tea she'd brought from her own apartment. When she offered to tell their fortunes in the leaves, Julie began to giggle . . . until she saw Bill was taking it perfectly seriously. Maybe it was the quiet way Mrs. Mimms had discussed their futures over the brown leaves, as if she'd been there herself. Funny old duck. Wonderful with Georgie, though; and the other girls swore by her. Bill hadn't batted an eye when she predicted it would be a girl this time, and perfectly healthy and all right.

Julie peeked into the bedroom where Georgie was sleeping and pulled the blanket up under his chin. "According to Mrs. Mimms, my lad, you'll be getting a baby sister soon," she whispered. Bill *had* changed lately. Not so gloomy somehow, nicer. But *tea* leaves, for Heaven's sake, they couldn't have anything to do with . . .

She stopped trying to figure it out because the nausea returned. This time it was bad and she had to run for the bathroom.

The crisp directive—Zonally disguised as a contemporary telegram —was forwarded to Mrs. Mimms on a Monday night. Although it bore the Resident Destinyworker's address, it had come of course directly from the Chief's office for the code word DESTWORK headed the message. Decoded, it read:

> URGENT YOU CLOSE OUT PRESENT ASSIGNMENT IN DAY OR TWO. CONDITION 16 IN 22ND CENTURY APPROACHING CRISIS. IMPORTANT ALL AVAILABLE PERSONNEL BE CONCENTRATED. PICK-UP AT POINT OF ENTRY ACCORDING TO PROCEDURE. BRIEFING TO COME FROM KEY RESIDENTS. ALL VACATIONS AND LEAVES-OF-ABSENCE HEREWITH CANCELLED.

Mrs. Mimms sighed. It was always this way she reflected. Central was perpetually short of experienced help. The younger Destinyworkers, fresh from the colleges, always wanted to traipse off into the future where nothing practical ever got done. Oh, they argued, you could always read about the past if you wanted to and, anyway, since Direct Influence on Historic Continuum was strictly forbidden, what was the good of wandering around in musty yesterdays? Mrs. Mimms however knew better and so did every other member of the small cadre of qualified CPO's. A good CPO, a dedicated one, could always find loopholes in the Destiny Code. The past *could* be shaped in little ways even if the

organization *was* powerless to stop major catastrophes.

At any rate orders were orders and Mrs. Mimms began to consider the practical side of leaving Greenlawn. Packing was no problem. All CPO's were required to be Translation Alert in half an hour if necessary, inclusive of destroying all telltale evidence such as notes, papers, etc. Her apparatus was in perfect working order and the rent for that month was paid. Mrs. Mimms passed over these details quickly. She was thinking: it was invariably the *priorees* who suffered in emergency conversions.

The case book labeled ACTIVE was open on the table. There were two full pages alone of babysitting appointments she would have to cancel not to speak of the more serious cases, some of which were Second and Third Intensity. A heavy discouragement settled over Mrs. Mimms as she sat down at the apparatus to check certain images as they came and went on the screen. The Nortons, who hadn't been out for weeks, were fighting again; that date would have to be canceled. The delinquent attitude developing in the Bradley youngster was going to rob the world of a great scientist unless Mr. Bradley's business got back on its feet and he could spend more time with his son; Mrs. Mimms had a simple campaign mapped out for this, but it would take time—more time than she had left. Then there was the cocktail party the Haskells had been planning for weeks and Frank Haskell's boss was going to be there; Mrs. Mimms had left that date open especially because Frank's mother who had promised to take the kids overnight was going to be sick and they'd have to get someone to help her. And that teen-age picnic—there would be trouble unless she, and not someone else, were chaperoning it.

She dared not think of the growing list of Third Intensities. Another Condition Twelve in the far building and one developing on the floor directly above. Crippled old Mrs. Schaefer on the ground floor who had tried to commit suicide before with an overdose of sleeping tablets—and might certainly try it again if Mrs. Mimms didn't spend a few hours with her every week. And, as usual, on every assignment after a few months had gone by, the exhausting sleep-beaming by Destiny apparatus of the cases where she had no direct contact. There was the young doctor on the third floor who was becoming addicted to his own morphine supply. The campaign against Mrs. Jamison's frigidity which would be getting results in a few weeks. And the theft of company funds which the middle-aged clerk in B-18 was contemplating.

Yes, it was always the priorees who suffered on an incomplete assignment. Not to speak of the Destinyworker involved. All the months of careful work building up an event here, a circumstance there,

only to let the delicate fabric slip back again into the impersonal Historic Continuum. It wasn't fair, thought Mrs. Mimms. You were suddenly transferred to another Time Zone and there was no one to carry on. The answer from Central was always the same: NO AVAILABLE PERSONNEL. Not even a trainee. Not even—

Then Mrs. Mimms remembered the young salesman. It had been a particularly hectic day at Central. Mrs. Mimms and the Briefing Officer were conferring in the Chief's Office when the Chief finally pressed a buzzer in irritation and said, "He's still there? All right, I'll see him if he can state his case in five minutes." There were firm, tired lines around the Chief's full-lipped mouth. All day long the Translation Rooms had smelled of overionized electrodes as Destinyworkers arrived by the dozens from various Time Zones. Two thirds of the entire Past Division was being recalled and reassigned to a Condition 14 in the Twenty-Third—elimination of a teenage fad which was getting out of hand in North America. The Chief had smiled wanly as the young salesman shook hands and plunged into his sales talk.

"I know how busy you are, sir; thank you for seeing me. My firm, Duplicanicals Unlimited, believes it has the answer to your employment problem. Frankly, it's so simple that I'm amazed you haven't called on us to serve you before. Briefly, our plan is this. Your Operators go into the various Time Zones as usual and lay the preliminary groundwork (of course Duplicanicals *realizes* there's no *real* substitute for humanoid tactics at the outset of any case). Then," said the young man, bringing home his point triumphantly, "when the human Operator is needed elsewhere, a new model, low-cost Duplicanical takes over and carries on the work. Yes, every Duplicanical purchased from our firm can release a Destinyworker for an assignment in another Time Zone. A few basic specifications is all that our plant needs to duplicate any Destinyworker down to—if I may say so—the slightest detail. In emergencies, a simple photograph will do. Our skilled craftsmen can deliver a finished model to your offices in a matter of hours. Android construction guaranteed throughout at rock bottom prices. Why, a child could follow the simple instructions enclosed with every . . ."

But already the Chief had turned back to the map of North America; he had smiled politely and told the salesman to leave any literature he had with his secretary.

Mrs. Mimms made a decision.

She picked up the telephone and dialed a number. Even before the Resident Destinyworker had time for a greeting, Mrs. Mimms said:

"George, I want to send a message to Central. Make it a flat Priority-to-Present; there's no time to waste with a Zonal Relay Letter.

ATTENTION: CHIEF, DESTINYWORKERS, INC. . . .

It was early evening when Eighty-One (Female, Duplicanical Pat. Pending U17809) entered the apartment and carefully set down the two black suitcases. For an hour she had been seated on the bus which had carried her from the address in New York out to Greenlawn. All the while she had been smiling faintly as per Similarity Instruction 3.

Eighty-One's cybertechnic brain hummed smoothly as she unpacked the bags and set up the Destiny apparatus (Work Instruction 17). Although she was neither cold nor hot, she removed the plain brown coat (Human Function 55). From Eighty-One's chest there came the nearly imperceptible ticking of her rotary stabilizer; it lessened slightly when she sat down at the desk as the take-up tension relaxed on key bearings.

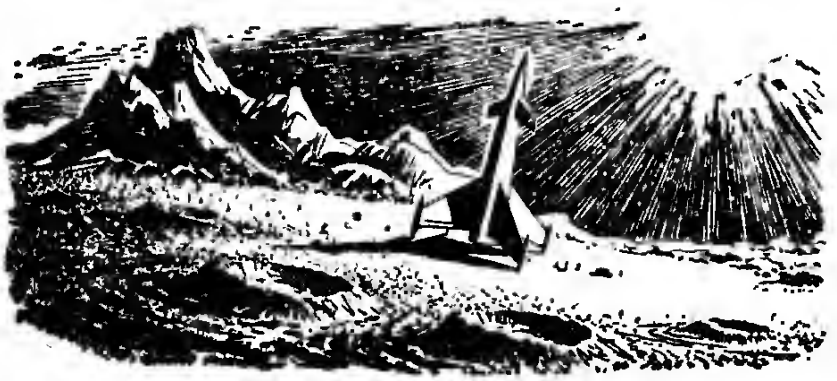
From one of the black suitcases she took a copy of *The Destiny-worker's Manual & Guide* and also a photocopy of a notebook marked ACTIVE. She opened both books simultaneously and began to read. Without a glance at the bed behind her, she turned the pages slowly and uniformly until next morning when the books were finished. Word-for-word copies of them were now lightly etched on the tape reels behind her deftly molded Pigma-Foam forehead, and even now were being fed into the Action-and-Motion Editor at the base of her Myoplastic skull.

Satisfied, Eighty-One raised her hand in Female Instinctive Function 14 and smoothed her graying Spun-Tex hair, feeling the hard stitching on the scalp beneath.

Then the telephone rang and Eighty-One picked it up.

"This is Clair Howard in C-12, Mrs. Mimms. I'm so shamed to ask on such short notice but I'm *desperate* for a sitter tomorrow afternoon. Can you possibly come over?"

"Why of course," answered the Duplicanical.



the lizard of woz

by . . . Edmund Cooper

YNKWYSYTYV dropped his flying saucer down to ten thousand feet and allowed it to amble through the sky at a thousand miles an hour. Below him lay the United States of America, which he found very boring to look at.

His telescope had revealed no signs at all of intelligent lizard life —only a host of odd-looking bipeds who lived in peculiar shaped hives and used primitive land carriages to get from one place to another. True, they had flying machines— but of a somewhat amateurish design.

As a matter of fact, Ynkwysytyv had whiled away the last few minutes by playing leap-frog with two ridiculously flimsy jet aircraft. But when they began to pump rockets at him, he lost his temper and neatly burned off their wings with a heat ray—which made life interesting for a couple of incredulous Air Force pilots. Fortunately, their ejector seats and parachutes were in working order.

The place would probably have to be fumigated, he thought. Robots would be much much more efficient.

If the truth be known, Ynkwysytyv—or Ynky, as his colleagues in the United Planets Organization called him—was not only bored but definitely unhappy. He had to ad-

Edmund Cooper, who will be remembered for his perhaps prophetic INTRUDERS ON THE MOON *(April 1957)* (Why don't they make a movie of it?) *is best known as the author of* THE INVISIBLE BOY, *on which a recent film was based. He describes this story as "a cocktail of science fiction and satire."*

mit, however, that the assignment to this remote and backward area of the galaxy was largely his own doing. If he had not allowed his tail to be turned by the irresistible scales and the seductive yellow streak of the Senior Administrator's only daughter, he would still be at U.P.O. headquarters on Woz.

He sighed nostalgically as he thought of his home planet, five hundred light-years away. He sighed as he remembered the clear green skies, the deep blue grass, the pink rain forests and the boiling crimson oceans. Then he snorted with disgust as he looked down at the miserable world he had come to survey.

The colors were wrong, the inhabitants were backward and ugly, and the whole place would probably have to be fumigated to make it fit for colonization. Possibly a few of the more intelligent natives could be retained for slave labor. But their rudimentary technology seemed to indicate that this was hardly worthwhile. Robots would be far more efficient.

However, his instructions were to survey the planet, establish friendly contact with the inhabitants, and prepare a detailed report on their culture—if any. All of which was a complete waste of time, since the report would be filed away and forgotten for a couple of centuries. Then some junior official would stumble across it and sign an order for total demolition under the slum clearance programme.

Ynky had every justification for taking a cynical view of life. His journey to the Solar System had lasted more than ten years, and his hibernation clock had accidentally woken him up eighteen months before planetfall—thus giving him ample opportunity for reflection on lizard's inlizardity to lizard. It was downright vindictive of the Senior Administrator to pack him off to this hole—and all because his sex-band had turned purple at the wrong moment.

Being a mere two hundred years old, Ynky regarded it as the worst possible beginning for the best century of his youth. By the time he got back to Woz all the females in his egg-group would have mated, and he would be condemned to a bachelor existence for at least another seventy-five years.

During his hibernation in the flying saucer, Ynky had naturally been programmed to fluency in all major terrestrial languages; for he was not the first Woz lizard to visit Earth. Some years previously, a blue-tailed language specialist had touched down to do research on elementary methods of communication. He had managed to beam back to Woz the basic language patterns of English, French, Russian and Chinese before being converted into a nourishing soup by the uncultured inhabitants of New Guinea.

Ynky gazed distastefully down at the planetary surface and shrug-

ged. Might as well make a start somewhere. He reluctantly eased the saucer earthwards.

Below was a deserted highway and an equally deserted roadside café. Ynky hovered indecisively for a moment, wondering whether he should press on to a more promising location. But what was the use? The whole civilization was monotonously primitive.

He touched down about a hundred yards from the café. He got out of the saucer, sniffed the air cautiously—too much poisonous oxygen and not enough nitrogen—and began to walk along the highway. Then, realizing that he had forgotten something, he went back and rendered the saucer invisible as a precaution against any curious bipeds who happened along.

As lizards go, Ynky was an impressive specimen. Poised erect on his hindlegs, he was four foot tall, excluding an extra three foot of red and purple tail that waved proudly behind him like an animated battle standard. However, in accordance with what the late blue-tailed language specialist had observed of diplomatic procedure, he also wore a top hat and morning coat.

His entrance, therefore, at the *Shady Nook Café* introduced an element of novelty into the otherwise quiet existence of its proprietor, one Sam Goodwin. Sam, whose favorite relaxation was to read all about bug-eyed monsters, behaved with commendable fortitude when one actually appeared.

"Howdy," said Sam, scratching his gray hair and trying to look as if the top hat hadn't shaken him at all. "How are things in the galaxy?"

Ynky was pleasantly surprised by this first contact with homo sapiens. He had anticipated some initial difficulty.

"We try to keep the constellations burning," he said modestly, "but you know how it is."

"Sure," agreed Sam confidentially. "What'll you eat? Steak, fried chicken, burger?"

Ynky shuddered, remembering the blue-tailed lizard's repeated warnings about the standard of terrestrial cooking. "I'll take fruit," he said. "A dozen apples, a dozen oranges and a dozen bananas."

"Drink?" said Sam, filling the counter with fruit.

"Milk," decided Ynky. "About six quarts."

He disposed of the lot simultaneously, to Sam's intense interest. Ten seconds later, Ynky dexterously slipped an arm down his throat and extracted empty milk cartons, banana skins and orange peel all neatly tied up in a plastic wrapper for disposal.

"Cute trick," observed Sam. "Is that normal, or just for the benefit of the natives?"

"Normal," said Ynky. "We have somewhat delicate table manners on Woz."

"Come again?"

"Woz is my home planet. I have been given the task of reporting to

the United Planets Organization on the state of your world. . . . I may add that, though I find you as a biped less repulsive than I had expected, I shall probably have to recommend fumigation."

"You have my interest," said Sam. "What is fumigation, and why?"

Ynky leaned on the counter, removed his top hat and expounded. "Fumigation is a means of rendering a planet sterile by the introduction of an interesting gas that our chemists have developed. It is a breeder gas. That is to say, if a small quantity is introduced into any atmosphere it will quickly make the whole atmosphere lethal. . . . A fine achievement, don't you think? Well beyond your own elementary science, of course."

Sam had read about this sort of situation in the pulp magazines. He was not sure he approved of it.

"Permit me to enquire," he said courteously, "why this little old planet should be fumigated?"

Ynky smiled. "We have made the mistake of trying to civilize bipeds before. Too intractable. There were some rather promising apes on Sirius Five—intelligent enough to train as technicians, or so we thought. Unfortunately, they developed a mania for political independence and blew three of our battle squadrons out of space before we demonstrated to them the error of their ways. . . . So you see, it is not wise to educate inferior creatures beyond their natural ability. It will be rather a pity about homo sapiens. In some ways you are a definite improvement on the apes of Sirius."

"Thank you," said Sam. "That's nice to know."

"Don't mention it," said Ynky. "There is the possibility of retaining a few slaves, of course. If you are interested, I'll gladly recommend you."

"Thank you," repeated Sam. "That's real considerate. . . . I guess you must have a pretty big team investigating Earth right now."

Ynky gave him a patronizing smile. "No," he said. "Only me. One lizard was considered adequate for such a simple assignment."

"Interesting!" Sam removed his spectacles and polished them carefully. "Now just supposing you failed to turn in a report?"

Ynky was surprised at human stupidity. "But I *shall* turn in a report. That is what I am here for. Needless to say, it will be entirely impartial and thoroughly scientific."

"Naturally," agreed Sam. "But just assuming—for the sake of argument—that your report didn't reach headquarters?"

"A ridiculous assumption." Ynky yawned. "But in that case, someone would discover the omission eventually, and another lizard would be sent. In a couple of centuries or so. After all, from our point of view the problem is not terribly urgent."

Sam Goodwin smiled. "Excuse me a moment." He disappeared

through a door at the back of the café. A few seconds later he returned. There was a double-barreled shot-gun in his hands. It was pointed at Ynky.

"Nothing personal," said Sam. "But as homo sapiens—of which fraternity I have the honor to be a life member—is a trifle busy just now, it occurs to me that fumigation might inconvenience us a little."

Ynky had no experience of the antique weapons of Earth. He had, however, grasped the fact that Sam Goodwin seemed a shade antisocial. At the same time that superior sixth sense, which had enabled the lizards of Woz to thrive as a species for twenty million strenuous years, rang an alarm bell in the depths of his reptilian brain. Ynky dropped on all fours just as Sam squeezed the trigger.

The first blast ventilated his top hat in a most alarming manner. And the second blast, which came as he scuttled at speed through the main doorway of the *Shady Nook Café,* gave him the doubtful distinction of being the first lizard of Woz to sport a perforated tail complete with ornamental lead inlay. But he did not stop to admire the result. For Sam had followed him on to the highway, and was inserting fresh shells in his shotgun.

Ynky scuttled back to his saucer in nothing flat. He rendered it visible once more, and jumped in as Sam's third blast rattled harmlessly against the hull. Ynky kicked the controls. With a great whoosh, the saucer did a vertical take-off and shot up to fifty thousand feet at a velocity which did not improve the digestive state of a dozen bananas, oranges and apples: also six quarts of milk. They seemed to be conspiring towards a minor rebellion in his third stomach.

Presently, the hiccups subsided, and Ynky was able to consider the condition of his tail. Besides being somewhat painful, it was also tattered, the red and purple hues assuming a distinctly unhealthy tonal value. He wiggled it experimentally. A new stab of pain leap-frogged along his spinal cord, but the tail responded. No permanent damage: merely a few embedded souvenirs of American hospitality.

As an attempt to establish friendly contact with the natives, Ynky's recent experience—though yielding valuable information concerning the instability of the species—was hardly an unqualified success. He relieved his feelings by stepping savagely on the accelerator, at the same time expressing his opinion of Sam Goodwin and his *Shady Nook Café* in the singularly poetic lizard tongue of Woz.

By the time he had run out of suitable adjectives, his flying saucer had crossed the rest of the United States, the Pacific Ocean, the Sea of Okhotsk and was already halfway across the steppes of Central Asia. Pausing for a while to inspect the somewhat different terrain, Ynky was gratified to discov-

er vast tracts of wilderness as yet relatively unspoiled by the hand of homo sapiens.

In fact, the only evidence of human stupidity was a symbolic metal snake that rippled lugubriously across the continent for hundreds of miles. Ynky realized, of course, that although mankind had partly emerged from the Stone Age, it had not yet discarded the archaic system of rail transport. But for a lizard whose home planet had developed the more efficient methods of time travel and teleportation, the Trans-Siberian Railway was not without a certain mild historical fascination.

Somewhere between Omsk and Tomsk, Ynky—whose tail had now ceased throbbing—decided to drop down and investigate. At a point where an apparently disused road intersected the railway, there was a single stone hive, obviously the dwelling of a biped. Here would be an excellent opportunity to reestablish friendly contact for the purpose of culture analysis, while at the same time watching the trains go by.

Ynky touched his flying saucer down about fifty yards from the house of one, Ivan Sergeyevitch Poushov, who had had the honor of being a Stakhanovite Crossing Keeper of the Soviet Union ever since the nineteen thirty-six purge had accounted for his predecessor. This time, Ynky did not bother to render the saucer invisible. It would be easier to locate if he should again need to depart rapidly.

Ivan Sergeyevitch had observed the saucer's arrival with some apprehension. It had not come from the direction of Moscow, but then the ways of the political police are inscrutable. Hastily he polished his shoes, combed his beard and went out to greet his visitor—at the same time mentally preparing himself to deny everything.

"Greetings, Comrade," said Ivan Sergeyevitch, gazing at Ynky and privately marveling at the lengths to which the political police will go in the matter of disguise.

"Greetings," responded Ynky cautiously. "I am Ynkwysytyv of Woz."

"And I, Excellency, am Poushov of Slobovanutsky Crossing." Ivan Sergeyevitch hesitated, then added tentatively: "I trust, Comrade, that you will do me the honor of taking a glass of vodka at my unworthy table? We will drink to the health of our heroic collective leadership."

"I have no doubt," retorted Ynky, "that your heroic collective leadership would be much improved by fumigation. Incidentally, we lizards of Woz do not approve of alcohol—except for medicinal purposes."

At which point it began to dawn upon Ivan Sergeyevitch that Ynky might possibly not be a secret agent after all. He was forced to admit that the lizard skin looked genuine enough; and Ynky's tail possessed an independence of movement that was slightly suggestive of western

decadence. But clearly, an error of judgment in this delicate matter might well prove fatal.

"Excellency," said Ivan Sergeyevitch, "pardon the stupidity of a politically enlightened though culturally confused Crossing Keeper, but where is Woz?"

"In a more select residential area of the galaxy."

"Permit me to ask," continued Ivan Sergeyevitch, surprised at his own temerity, "how one gets there."

Ynky gave him a superior lizard smile. "One turns sharp left after the Pole Star and continues straight ahead for five hundred light-years."

"It is, perhaps, a satellite?"

"Certainly not!" exclaimed Ynky with indignation. "It is a world of the first magnitude."

"No doubt recently liberated by the glorious Red Army?" pursued Ivan Sergeyevitch.

Ynky shook his head scornfully. "Your mother was an idiot, your father was an imbecile, and you are in a state of intellectual delirium. Fumigation will be an act of mercy."

By this time, Ivan Sergeyevitch had reached a definite conclusion. This strange visitor could not possibly be a member of the secret police. No M.V.D. agent would ever stoop to wearing a morning coat. His self-confidence returned.

"Woz is not, then, a Communist state?" he asked.

"Blockhead! Why should intelligent lizards descend to Communism?"

"If it is not a Communist state," reasoned Ivan Sergeyevitch grimly, "it is therefore a reactionary capitalist fascist democracy. I trust the proletariat is organized?"

"We have no proletariat."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Ivan Sergeyevitch. "You could not liquidate *all* the workers!"

"My friend," said Ynky gently, "there were no workers to liquidate. We use robots."

Ivan Sergeyevitch thrust his beard out aggressively. "Barbaric! How long have these unfortunate robots been exploited?"

"About twenty thousand years."

"What sublime endurance!" breathed Ivan Sergeyevitch in awe. "I expect the revolution will be unusually bloody."

Ynky yawned. "Poushov, you bore me. Fumigation of the planet seems to be inevitable. . . . Incidentally, when is the next train due?"

"Tomorrow, Excellency—or is it the day after? Perhaps you would care to wait. I cannot guarantee that it will stop, you understand."

"But I," said Ynky with a bland smile, "can guarantee that presently everything will stop. Meanwhile, I will pursue my investigations elsewhere. Good morning."

"One moment, Excellency. Permit me to present you with a small souvenir of this historic meeting." Ivan Sergeyevitch ran back into his cottage and returned a couple of

minutes later with a small metal box to which a key was fixed. "It is a machine designed to cure fatigue and sleeplessness," he explained. "Especially for intellectuals such as yourself, Excellency. Many of our most prominent party members have given similar models to their closest friends. The results proved highly satisfactory." Ivan Sergeyevitch gave the key a few turns then handed the box to Ynky.

The lizard examined it carefully. "A most interesting example of peasant craftsmanship," he announced. "I presume it develops psychostatic induction?"

"Undoubtedly," agreed Ivan Sergeyevitch. "I trust your honor will have a pleasant journey."

"Thank you," said Ynky. "I am almost inclined to change my mind and recommend you for slave labor."

With these expressions of mutual regard, Ivan Sergeyevitch returned to his cottage, and Ynky to his saucer. The Crossing Keeper watched Ynky's vertical take-off with a crafty smile. The mysterious flying machine was impressive, but definitely not to be compared with the wonderful MIGs that Ivan Sergeyevitch had read about. Besides, was not the saucer the product of a capitalistic economy?

Ivan Sergeyevitch was pleased with his morning's work on three counts. First, by a process of brilliant deduction, he had eliminated the possibility of Ynky being a member of the secret police. Second, he had unmasked the visitor as a capitalist spy. Third, he had struck a blow for the martyred robots of Woz. For his present to Ynky was an ingenious relic of the scorched earth programme devised by the military genius of the late Comrade Stalin. It had been originally intended for the benefit of occupation forces.

Ivan Sergeyevitch arrived at an intelligent decision. He would write a report about the incident. This, perhaps, would facilitate his promotion to the coveted post of assistant ticket collector at Tomsk.

Meanwhile, Ynky had climbed to thirty thousand feet and was proceeding southward in a leisurely fashion at three times the speed of sound. After the desolate stretches of Siberia, he was of a mind to sample terrestrial life in a tropical area. Possibly there would be a more amusing local variation.

He had crossed Sinkiang, Tibet, Burma and Siam; and was cruising slowly round the Malay Archipelago to choose an island suitable for investigation. Unfortunately, just as he was over the middle of the South China Sea, Ivan Sergeyevitch's time bomb—one of the few serviceable ones to be manufactured —blew the flying saucer's turret off in a most abrupt fashion.

For Ynky, in his confined cabin, the sound effect was like a hundred cymbals being clashed together. But eventually the vibrations died down; and he discovered much to his surprise that, although his

morning coat was now reduced to a few strands of tattered fiber, he personally was intact. Except for the fact that his tail had turned white with shock.

It was then that the resourcefulness for which the lizards of Woz are justly renowned came to his aid. Ynky saw that the South China Sea was coming up towards him more rapidly than he would have wished, and that presently he would be a very wet lizard. He promptly switched on the antigravity beam and the emergency superheated steam rockets. The antigravity beam, being quite disorientated, tipped the saucer upside down; but Ynky hung on by his tail, and with the aid of the steam rockets gained a certain rudimentary control. He promptly headed for the nearest piece of land which, as it happened, was the tiny jungle island of Komodo.

By a superb feat of saucer balancing, Ynky managed to crash land in a grove of palm-trees. By the time it had stopped raining coconuts, he had recovered from the ordeal sufficiently to wriggle out of the saucer and inspect the damage. Despondently, he concluded that the repairs would take at least three days. At the end of which, he promised himself grimly, he would return to Slobovanutsky Crossing and deal with Ivan Sergeyevitch in such a way that he would yearn for the blissful release of fumigation.

Absorbed as he was in contemplating the damage to the saucer's turret and the prospect of a just vengeance, Ynky was unaware that he was no longer alone. Finally, a discreet breathing on the back of his neck caused him to turn round.

He was confronted with the most wonderful, the most sylph-like, the most radiantly beautiful female he had ever seen. Her eyes were wide with innocence and deep with mystery. Her lovely sinuous body was a poem in plastic art. She wore a dazzling smile, and the air of one whose gentle form somehow concealed hot unquenchable fires. Which, in a way, was true since she happened to be a carnivorous Komodo dragon.

"I—I—I . . ." began Ynky in the lizard tongue which is conveniently universal. But then words failed him. He had never seen anything like this on Woz.

"Are you in trouble?" she asked in a voice that was at once as sweet as a siren and husky with a strange longing.

"No, dear lady," said Ynky, pulling himself together. "I am in paradise. . . . Never have I seen such perfection of form! I feel that I have journeyed five hundred light-years just for this moment."

The Komodo dragon's five foot tail shivered slightly, and she blushed. "I bet you say that to all the lizards."

"Angel," confessed Ynky, remembering the Senior Administrator's daughter, "it is true that there were others. But they meant noth-

ing. Until now, I have never lived. . . . Incidentally, my name is Ynkwysytyv. But you may call me Ynky."

She held out her hand, and Ynky was entranced by the razor sharp talons. "I am a Komodo dragon," she murmured softly. "But just call me Kanna-Belle."

"Kanna-Belle!" exclaimed Ynky in rapture. "What a perfect name."

The Komodo dragon blushed once again. "It is rather unusual, isn't it?"

"So tender, so appropriate," said Ynky.

The Komodo dragon smiled, displaying rows of flawless teeth. "Oh, well, if you say so." She turned towards the flying saucer. "Tell me, dear Ynky, what is *that* peculiar thing?"

Ynky puffed out his chest and explained his mission. "Theoretically," he concluded, "I should repair the saucer and take my report back to Woz. . . . But, Beloved, I can't possibly recommend fumigation of the planet where we first set eyes on each other."

"I should think not," said the Komodo dragon indignantly. "Especially as I have no desire to emigrate. I am perfectly well adjusted to my present environment, thank you."

"But there is my duty to consider," said Ynky sadly. "Although you may not be aware of it, Kanna-Belle, the lizards of Woz are the most enlightened in the galaxy. Destiny has chosen us for the creation of a galactic empire, which will be a monument to the indomitability of the lizard spirit for all time."

"How terribly aggressive you are," said the Komodo dragon demurely. "It frightens me."

Ynky, who had completely lost his heart to this adorable creature, threw himself at her feet and said: "Kanna-Belle, I cannot bear to make you unhappy. . . . If only it were possible for me to stay with you in this delicious paradise."

The Komodo dragon looked thoughtful. "Perhaps that can be arranged," she whispered. And her voice held such promise that Ynky forgot all about fumigation and galactic empires.

He leaped up exultantly. "My darling, why not? We will be inseparable."

"Forever," agreed the Komodo dragon, with a faraway look in her eyes.

"The perfect partnership," said Ynky. "My brains and your beauty."

"Indissolubly united," smiled Kanna-Belle, coiling her long and magnificent tail. "In life and also in death. . . . Forgive me for mentioning it, my love, but I am really quite famished."

Whereupon two hundred pounds of muscle uncoiled with the speed of a whiplash and the function of a blackjack. Ynky was permitted one moment of horrified disbelief before his confused brain was effi-

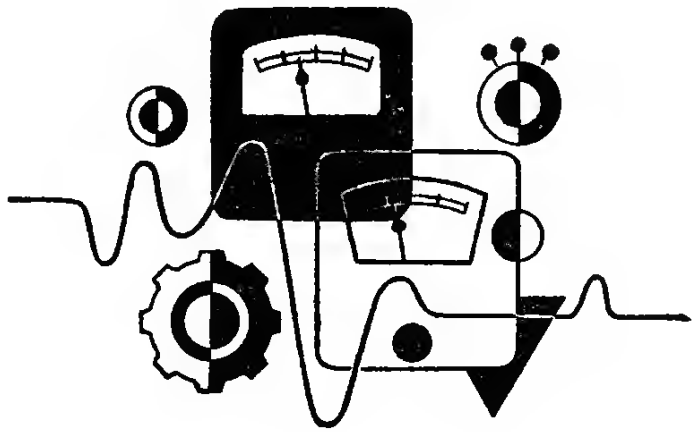
ciently homogenized. He hit the ground with a reproachful sigh.

The Komodo dragon measured his corpse critically, and shook her head. Ynky was just a trifle undernourished by Komodo standards.

"Much better, my love," she soliloquized sadly, "than a broken heart. . . . And how noble to perish for an ideal!"

Then she sat down and systematically ate him.

And this, my friends, is the true reason why Earth will not be fumigated for at least a couple of centuries; why Sam Goodwin's *Shady Nook Café* has been remodeled as *The Flying Saucer Roadhouse;* why Ivan Sergeyevitch Poushov is an assistant ticket collector at Tomsk; and why Kanna- Belle, the Komodo dragon, has a snug circular apartment in the jungle—with atomic air conditioning!



"OPEN ALL DOORS" PROVEN PROPHETIC

COLE EVERARD, in Harry Harrison and Hubert Pritchard's OPEN ALL DOORS (*Fantastic Universe,* February 1958) was fighting for recognition of the fact that his cofactor went "directly to the biochemical lesion in schizophrenia." Some readers may have remembered this when they saw a recent news-story reporting that some sick human minds were being restored by "fixing" a chemical mistake in the body. Research at the University of Wisconsin Hospitals and McArdle Memorial Laboratory has established that mental signs resembling schizophrenia show up in about one-third of the victims of a disease known as porphyria, a biochemical lesion, and that both porphyria and scleroderma, a serious skin disease, involve a chemical mistake in the body. The administration of certain drugs (as Cole Everard did in OPEN ALL DOORS) has brought good results in roughly four out of five cases treated. When the drugs have effect, the chemicals disappear.

substitute god

by . . . John Brunner

The sound filled him with sick horror. He turned to see what he knew must be there. What could he do?

IT WAS raining.

Lattimer turned over on his back and wished for a yielding plasti-foam mattress instead of this coarse hard mat of packed leaves. But he had wished for that every morning for three years, and it wasn't getting him one.

For a few minutes he lay and listened to the steady beat-beat of the rain thundering across the roof. The clock on the wall was an importation from Earth, and kept Greenwich time, but he had grown used to the mental gymnastics of compensation and preferred it to the complex self-adjusting models that they used at the port. His subconscious calculated that it lacked fifteen minutes of rising time, give or take a minute.

He turned over and buried his face in the pillow. Somehow the fifteen minutes went in a flash, and there came a soft tapping at the door.

He threw the blanket aside and stood up, rubbing his eyes. After pulling on his robe, he went to open up.

The native bowed ceremoniously, the light—dulled by the heavy veil of overcast—gleaming on his rain-

John Brunner, who will be remembered for his RENDEZVOUS WITH DESTINY *(March 1958) has written that the nature of science fiction is speculation. Lattimer's Venus — the Venus of those over whom he rules — is of course no more improbable than would be our times to the nineteenth century.*

slicked fur. It wasn't really fur, of course—it only served to trap body oils and keep his sensitive skin dry in the unceasing wetness. Even after three years, Lattimer had to wait until the native straightened before he could recognize him and make the formal acknowledgment.

"Is it a good day?" he asked.

"It is a good day," said the native. His head came up and Lattimer identified him as Ris. He folded his forelimb webs back against the bone, revealing the basket of food he had protected under them. "I bring the offering. Is it well?"

"It is well," said Lattimer. It was, this time. His mouth watered at the sight of the paplet and broomak the basket held.

The native lowered it to the floor inside the entrance and retreated, bowing again. Lattimer waited for him to retire properly—it was unseemly for Ris to see him take the basket up—but he appeared strangely hesitant. Risking—as he always had to—being found wrong, he said, "The audience today will be when the shadow of the time-tree reaches the fifth mark."

Ris bowed again, but still did not turn and leave. This implied trouble of some kind, thought Lattimer. He cast around in his mind for a possible explanation, but was forced to give it up. He said, "Ris may speak that which he wishes."

Ris's webs spread and re-folded in a gesture of nervousness. It was rare for the freedom of speech to be given except in full audience—but it was a signal honor, all the same. He said, "May it please you, there is the question of the human in the forest."

Lattimer froze into startled immobility. This was impossible! There wasn't another man within two hundred miles, except the maintenance crew at the spaceport across the ridge, and they did not venture alone from their own colony. He kept his face carefully mask-like while he answered with an affected air of boredom, "What of him?"

"He has remained in one place by himself for a day and part of a day—so long as it would take the time-tree's shadow to reach from the first to the fourth mark. We cannot understand his words, and he will not leave his place."

God almighty, thought Lattimer—and the concept brought a wry smile to his eyes, though it got no further—a man out alone in the forest. Where the hell did he come from? More important—what was he doing?

Aloud, he said, "You have brought him offerings?"

"Assuredly. Even such as we have brought to you."

He wouldn't starve, then. "There is no need to do more," he added aloud, his mind working furiously. He didn't dare disrupt the standard cycle of an audience day. First there was the audience itself, and he had gathered prior word that there was a long case to hear. Then he had told Chief Miglaun that he wished

to survey the new plantings of curra and paplet in the paddies to the west of the village. Then there was the fact that this made the fourth rain in three days, and the levee surrounding those fields was none too strong. He couldn't get away before nightfall, in all likelihood, and the natives wouldn't stir out into the forest once it was dark.

But equally, he couldn't leave a man out there. Maybe, if the stranger was carrying a radio pack, he could contact him, but as far as locating him went, it would be chancy homing in the forest on a weak signal. The static build-up would be partially released by this rain, but the prospect was far from good.

Well, if the worst came to the worst, he reasoned, he could postpone the inspection of the fields on the grounds that his brother wished to confer with him.

"I thank you, Ris," he said. "Your concern for my brother is well-meant, though of course needless. Perhaps I shall visit him this day."

Seal-black, moving with the sinuous grace of a seal, Ris retreated down the hill towards the village. Lattimer closed the door and stood leaning against it. *Now* what in hell was he in for? Wasn't it bad enough just being here and running the place—?

He picked up the basket and transferred its contents to the food-cupboard. Absently, he selected the best of the paplets and dropped it in the cleaner to be readied for his breakfast. Then he put on his best breeches and slicker, and a pair of thigh-boots—the mud in the paddy would be somewhere around knee-level after this rain. He combed his beard, wishing that someone would invent an everlasting razor-blade, or better yet, a depilatory which didn't make his face sore, and trimmed off a few untidy wisps of hair behind his ears. All the time his mind was working over the problem of who the stranger might be.

In the middle of breakfast he got up from his chair and tried the locator on his radio. The rain had only discharged part of the static from the overcast, and sighting was bad, but he got some sort of blip from a spot almost five miles off in the forest—on a rough line to the spaceport and not far from the pegging-ground where he'd split the last jume. It was very faint, but it looked sufficiently like the emanation from a tired personal beacon to make him sure of his estimate.

That was bad. There was nothing on the communicating band—only the continuous weather call from the port, dimmed by the mountains. Either the stranger had not got a talkie, or he was tired of trying to get an answer—or he was afraid of getting an answer.

If his last guess was right, he was headed for a whole load of trouble.

He glanced at the clock and saw with a start that he was already a minute late for audience. He shut

off the locator and made for the door, only to stop, face about and come back hastily for his blaster. It would never do to attend an audience without his power-symbol. And it was a measure of his agitation that he had almost forgotten.

The audience was held in the center of the village, near the time-tree which had been one of his first jobs when he arrived. He had got tired of having no standard of time by which to arrange his meetings with the natives, though they weren't worried by it. So he had installed a tree and put rings around it, designing them carefully so that the faint, dim shadow cast by the big bright blur that was the sun would intersect them at easily identifiable times. It was a chancy, fallible system, but it was rare for the sun to be so blotted out by the overcast that it was quite impossible for a shadow to be detected. And it had the great point of complete non-mechanization in its favor.

He arrived, walking slowly as soon as he came in sight, to find the elders of the village already assembled. Ris, he noticed, was receiving glances of envy from his neighbors. He must have spread the word that he had been granted free speech with Lattimer at rising time.

Lattimer hid his smile and took his place on a small dais before the council square with the slow dignity befitting a man. He said, "Let Chief Miglaun stand forth."

In the front row of squatting natives, the chief slid forward lithely. He said, "May it please you, we have two disputes among us."

"I will hear them," nodded Lattimer. He frowned with the effort of concentration. It was a difficult task keeping his mind on the petty squabbles of these people when there was a man loose in the forest. It was not what the natives might do that worried him—it was what the man might do. He could upset quite a lot of things, not least himself.

The first case proved easily resolvable. He had in fact settled an identical dispute some months before, but the natives had not yet reached the stage of judging by precedent. For them, life was still one long today.

When the parties had stated their claims in the matter of the disputed land-trade, he gave judgment without hesitation.

The second case was the one he had expected for some weeks. One of the chief's egg-sibs was involved, which made it inevitable that it would in time be passed out of the tribal jurisdiction to the court of final appeal—that was himself. Nonetheless, the chief had put up a steady fight to have it resolved in favor of his sib, and Lattimer thought he detected a slight air of displeasure in the attitude of the elders. He gave himself up to the tangles of the law with almost heart-felt relief. The necessity for passing judgment meant that he had no chance to make up his mind about the stranger—yet.

Have to do something about old Miglaun, he reflected. It's bad for tribal discipline to find fault with the chief, but if he tries to drag in nepotism I'll have to depose him.

The case dragged on. The rain lightened and let up. The shadow, faint though it was, of the time-tree reached the sixth and final mark and began to drift back. While he listened to the evidence, Lattimer made his decision. This was going to be tough on Miglaun, but it was his own fault. He had got himself the chieftaincy by a bit of sharp practice in the first place, and the flurry of electing a new one would give him a respite from the proposed tour of inspection. That meant he could slip out into the forest, taking a couple of non-partisans—say Ris and Flaokh, the two Awakeners, who could not meddle in politics because of their religious office. They would be able to put him in touch with the stranger easily enough.

He stood up from his chair. Instantly the natives stopped their wrangling and looked at him expectantly.

He mustered an expression of disdain and contempt. "You will find a new chief," he said shortly. "Chief Miglaun has tried to sway my judgment from the path of justice with fair words on behalf of his egg-sib, thinking that I will pay more heed to his sayings than to those of a common member of the clan. Be it known that this is not so. In my ears have the words of an honest commoner more weight than those of a partial chief. This case may be re-stated when Miglaun no longer has the garb of chieftaincy to color his evidence. I have spoken."

A wonderful idea in theory, thought Lattimer wryly. He wished it could be more genuinely applied. Then he looked tensely around the circle of elders to see if his words had met with approval. They would be carried out regardless, of course —he had "spoken"—but it was as well to keep the goodwill of the elders. With a faint stirring of relief he noticed that they all relaxed together. That was what they wanted, then.

He added, "The audience is adjourned until there is a new chief. Ris!"

The senior Awakener shuffled forward through the crowd.

"I desire that you and Flaokh, whom I have debarred from chieftaincy in view of your high office in my service, shall accompany me now that I go to confer with my brother in the forest. Is it well?"

"It is well," said Ris, his webs furling and unfurling as if he were trying to convey his surprise and delight simultaneously.

It took Lattimer only a few minutes to check that the blip he had caught on the locator was still in the same place, and to make sure that the drizzle of the rain had not damped the magazine of his blaster. His best clothes would have to do for this trip—the election of

the chief might go through smoothly for once, one never knew, and he might have to re-commence the audience at short notice.

Then there came a hesitant tapping at the door again, and he opened it and went out to find Ris and Flaokh waiting on the stoep. He said, "Is it well?"

"It is well," the Awakeners replied in chorus.

"Then come with me."

He set a brisk but not undignified pace with which the natives had little trouble in keeping up. The path they were to take led them past the fields he had intended to survey, and he noted with a slight frown that the levee was not doing so well as he had hoped. The incessant rain had pulped the tough bark of the stanchions into softness, and that meant a new working party out here tomorrow. He couldn't spare them today, of course. In some ways it was a pity at times like this that he had insisted on all adult members of the tribe attending audiences and elections and taking part in tribal affairs, but it would set a useful precedent at later stages of their development.

Beside him the two natives kept silence, except for the splashing of their feet in the wet earth. He hoped devoutly that he wouldn't have to ask them for guidance—the ability of one man to talk to another across miles of country was one of the deepest-rooted of their articles of faith. Unfortunately, since the stranger either had no talkie or was using none, he had to rely on the only too fallible locator trace.

After a while he condescended to relax a little, and said, "Whom do the people say shall be the next chief?"

Ris, flapping his webs, answered, "It will be most likely Chinsel. People remember the commendation you gave him for his planning of the paddies. It was even as you said: his work was of a standard that would not have shamed a man."

Lattimer considered. It was good to find that they were coming to recognize administrative ability, and it was quite true that Chinsel had shown a remarkable intuitive grasp of engineering requirements in his design for the levee. Of course, it had had to be strengthened three times in as many months, but that was to be expected, and certainly it was praiseworthy to succeed as well as that with no more than hints by way of guidance from Lattimer.

Ris appeared to think he had been over-bold in comparing Chinsel to a man, even in view of his privileged position. He fell behind slightly, and allowed Flaokh to come up beside Lattimer. The party continued in silence.

In the light gravity the man had the advantage of making fast time where the ground was firm, but where it had melted into mud the natives made that up, and they took barely an hour to reach the spot at which the blip had shown. Lattimer

mentally crossed his fingers. If the man had moved, he would have a *lot* of difficulty explaining why he could not find him.

They crossed the pegging-ground where the monstrous carcass of the last jume to come marauding through this part of the country lay neatly stretched out on its wooden frame. Beneath it the little pottery jars which collected the valuable secretions from its five major glands were almost full, and he made a mental note to have them collected. The natives' metabolism had not yet come under serious study, and the existence of a natural source of antibiotics for them was not to be overlooked. The forty-foot bulk of the monster had shrunk slightly, but it would take another month for its flesh to become soft enough for the natives to carve it up and bury it.

They skirted the body. On the far side of the clearing a faint trail showed between the trees, and Lattimer followed it optimistically. As it turned out, he was correct in his choice. Only a few yards further on three baskets of offerings lay untouched at the mouth of a friendly-palm, whose matted leaves formed a sort of vegetable cavern ten feet deep.

The natives drew back in awe and hesitation. Lattimer told them to come forward and not to be afraid. He raised his voice and called in the native language, "Come forth, brother!"

There was a cautious stirring at the mouth of the palm, and a man looked out from between the leaves. At the sight of the natives he drew back, cursing.

"Is the human angry?" demanded Ris anxiously. "Have we offended him? We have brought him only such gifts as you have accepted."

Lattimer motioned him to silence. "I shall now speak to him in the human tongue," he said quietly. "I shall find the reason for my brother's displeasure."

Brother, he thought. Egg-sib was the only translation of its exact meaning—but somehow, though he accepted the precise semantic equivalent mentally when thinking of the monosexual natives, he still clung to the human aspect when he referred to another man.

The two natives shied at mention of the holy language, and scuttered to the edge of the clearing. *"Allo!"* said Lattimer in International. "Kis e tu? O e amik!"

Again the face appeared. It was dirty. It bore a ten-day-old beard that was matted and untidy. Its eyes were tired and inflamed. Lattimer was profoundly glad that Ris and Flaokh had never seen any down-and-outs from whom they might have drawn conclusions about this specimen of man.

He saw Lattimer, and instantly a blaster was poking through the gap in the foliage. The natives saw the power-symbol and rejoiced aloud, keeningly.

"Ne tir!" said Lattimer sharply. "Keske tu fas, ne tir!" He searched

the other's face for some sign of understanding. Apparently he did not speak International, though it was the safest bet. He tried English, and repeated, "Don't shoot! Whatever you do, don't shoot!"

"So you do talk human," said the stranger sullenly. He lowered the blaster and stepped to the mouth of the cavern. Lattimer looked him up and down.

"You've had a rough time of it," he said evenly. "What was the trouble?"

The stranger appeared to be considering. Then he holstered the blaster reluctantly. His clothes were badly torn—Lattimer guessed he had stumbled into a zareba bush somewhere—and his arms and legs were marked with its scratches. He said, "What are those things? Pets?"

Lattimer hid his surprise. "They are my Awakeners," he said. "A couple of senior officials from my village. It's only five miles back that way. I can offer you food and clothes and a bath. And something for those scratches of yours."

The other did not appear to have heard the last part of the statement. He was gazing incredulously at the natives. At length he laughed briefly. "Senior officials, you call them! They look like a couple of performing seals to me."

"They do, don't they?" agreed Lattimer. "By the way, my name's Lattimer. I'm a Resident, as you must have guessed."

"Can't see anyone dropping in on this place for more than a quick look-see," said the other. "Name's —Tomson. Jim Tomson."

Lattimer failed to comment on the hesitation. "You can't stay here," he said reasonably. "I'm afraid it'll be some time before the next car from the port looks in on my place, but I can let you have a guide to the foot of the ridge, if you like, and the next Resident along will see you through the rest of the way. How come you're here, anyway?"

Tomson hesitated again. "Came with a group of prospectors," he said finally. "I mislaid the rest of the party. I expect there'll be a search out for me."

"I suppose so," said Lattimer calmly. He turned and made for the narrow path back through the forest. After a pause, Tomson fell into step with him.

He said nothing further until they reached the pegging-ground. Then the sight of the monstrous carcass of the jume made him catch his breath, and he asked with an edge of fear on his voice, "Is that thing—dangerous?"

"It was," said Lattimer. He gave quick directions to Ris to pick up the jars beneath the frame and replace them with new ones.

"Are there — many of those things?" Tomson added.

"Not around here. That was the first we'd had in nearly four months," said Lattimer casually. "They're a bit of a problem further south. They're so mindless they

don't object to a blaster, and tough enough to take any kind of a bullet without noticing. The natives catch them in dead-falls and starve them to death—they have a faster metabolism than most creatures on the planet. Takes about three days to finish them."

With commendable sense, Flaokh had thrown the stale offerings out of one of the baskets nearby and packed the jars full of jume secretion in soft moss. He announced their readiness to Lattimer, and the party set out again. Tomson cast awed glances over his shoulder as they left the pegging-ground.

"I was lucky I didn't meet one of those things while I was out here," he ventured. "Or I wouldn't have lasted long." He tried a chuckle, which died on him.

Lattimer turned an unsmiling face to him. "It's nothing to joke about," he said soberly. "A jume is very careless about the way it kills people. It tends to break them up and leave them to die. Human beings interfere with its digestion."

Tomson turned his eyes firmly to the trail ahead.

They left Ris and Flaokh at the village, and continued up towards the Residency, which stood on the only piece of fairly high ground within miles. It was common to find such a spot chosen—perhaps the natives subconsciously assumed when building them that the men from beyond the sky wanted to be as near home as possible. Here Lattimer fetched out his first-aid kit, swabbed the scratches on Tomson's arms and legs with surgical spirit, and spread them with a tissue regenerant.

He realized as he returned the kit to the cupboard that the long walk had made him uncommonly hungry. He asked the other curiously, "How did you manage for food?"

"I had my emergency pack," said Tomson. He gestured at it, lying across a chair along with the little personal radio beacon which had guided Lattimer to his refuge.

"But that can't have lasted you long." Lattimer was taking paplets, broomak and chirrits from the food store. "Why didn't you take the offerings the natives brought? Or didn't you see them?"

"Offerings?" Tomson stared. Then he gestured at the fruits Lattimer had set out on the table. "You mean you eat this stuff? Is it safe?"

Lattimer needed absolutely no more confirmation of his suspicions. Any prospector who turned himself loose on the country without learning the local vegetation was doomed to a very short career. Ergo, Tomson was no prospector. He kept his face carefully calm as he said, "Certainly. They taste quite good, too."

Apprehensively, Tomson helped himself to a chirrit. When he bit it, he grimaced at the sharp flavor, but after a few mouthfuls he nodded in appreciation.

He ate as if he was half-starved. Across the table, Lattimer kept

up a careful front, trying not to let it appear that he was watching the other. Not a prospector. . . . That made it a better than even chance that Tomson—or whatever his real name was—was running away from someone.

After a while, the latter finished his food and glanced around. "Got a drink?" he asked.

"Surely," said Lattimer. He reached for the faucet of the rain-purifier. "That's one thing we're never short of."

"Ach, I don't mean water," said Tomson. "A real drink."

Lattimer twisted back in his chair. "No," he answered politely. "No alcohol. The bacteria here don't ferment in the same way as terrestrial ones."

Tomson pulled a wry face. "Well, guess I'll have to take your word for it. No tobacco either, I suppose."

"Won't grow and won't keep. Only wet-belt stuff will take to the climate. I don't use it, anyway."

"Pity." Tomson tilted back his chair and nodded out of the window at the village. "What is this place, anyway?"

"My village," said Lattimer without a trace of conceit. "I told you—I'm a Resident."

"Government agent?" said Tomson. There was something about the way he said it. Something—deliberately casual.

"In a way," Lattimer told him, shrugging. "I have a charter, but I don't tangle with the Service boys. Too much red tape. I'm only here to—keep the natives respectful."

He phrased it with care. Maybe Tomson would take it the wrong way.

He did. "Then all these animals—they're what they call Venusians?" he said. "This village—they built it?"

Lattimer nodded.

"I thought they were savages," Tomson went on. "It doesn't look too bad from what I saw of it. Do you have a lot of trouble keeping them in line?"

"I haven't up to now," said Lattimer pointedly.

Tomson missed the point. He looked the Resident over with narrowed eyes, as if assessing his toughness. He seemed to form a favorable opinion—favorable as far as Lattimer was concerned.

"How long before this car from the port which you mentioned?" he inquired.

"Going on two years," said Lattimer quietly. "I'm due for relief in twenty-two months from now."

He rose and began to throw paplet hulls into the dispenser. "Of course, as I said, I can arrange for some guides to get you back to the port."

Tomson shuddered elaborately. "If you don't mind," he said, "I'd rather not face that forest again just yet."

"As you like," said Lattimer. "I'd be glad of some human company." He stressed the last word but one very slightly. "But if you plan to

stay long, you'll have to learn the native language."

"Don't these seals talk English?"

Lattimer looked at him levelly. "They're forbidden to learn any human language," he said. "They might overhear things."

Tomson grinned lopsidedly. "I get," he said softly. "It might make them less respectful."

"Exactly," answered Lattimer. Heaven above, what had he done to deserve this?

There was a quiet knock at the door. Tomson started and tensed himself as Lattimer went to open. He found Flaokh waiting.

"Do you wish to continue your audience today?" the junior Awakener inquired politely, "or do you wish to confer further with your egg-sib?"

Lattimer checked the time. "I shall be present in the village when the shadow passes the third mark," he said. "As a mark of your respect, my brother"—same word, but he would never reconcile himself to the meaning of egg-sib in a human connection—"has announced that he will also be present."

Flaokh withdrew with the appropriate ceremony, and Lattimer turned to his involuntary visitor. "We'll have to go down to the village," he said. "I adjourned an audience this morning and told them to elect a new chief—the last one was trying to use his position to get favors for his relatives. It'll mean you coming with me, of course. They thought you were displeased when you didn't take their offerings in the forest, so you'll have to present yourself and show them you mean no harm."

Tomson stared unashamedly. Then he guffawed. "Sort of token of goodwill?" he asked. "All right—you know the ropes. Keep 'em happy at all costs, sort of thing."

"Not that exactly," said Lattimer. "By the way, I shall address you as—" he gave the native word for egg-sib. "To them, all men are as brothers. They haven't got a word for 'brother,' of course—they're hermaphroditic, like snails—but that is the nearest equivalent. It means 'born of the same egg.'"

Tomson laughed again. "I'd have hated to share an egg with anybody. All right. I'll look wise if you talk to me—is that the idea?"

"That's the idea," said Lattimer, forcing a smile.

For the next few days he refrained carefully from using the communication band of the radio. Tomson might have taken it the wrong way. If the port knew of the latter's presence on Venus, it was ten to one that they had assumed him dead in the forest.

Fortunately, of course, for the first few weeks at any rate, until he felt sure of himself, Tomson would remain on his best behavior, and Lattimer managed to make the best of that time. What he would do when the other man started to make a nuisance of himself, he didn't know and hardly cared to

think about. The risk of making an open break with him was too great to be contemplated. But he was walking a most horribly dangerous tight-rope.

It isn't easy for a man to be a god.

In the hope of putting off the inevitable, Lattimer took Tomson out and showed him his achievements—the drainage system, the levees around the paddy fields, the native pottery and housing designs. But Tomson remained steadily uninterested. He was content to let time go by in the life of comfort and relaxation which the constant care of the natives provided for him.

Almost three months went by before Lattimer's nerves began to tremble under the strain, and he broached the subject of the other's departure. At the first and second delicate mentions of it, Tomson brushed it aside, but at the third Lattimer was a little clumsy.

It was almost nightfall, and the rain had started again. After three years its drumming meant little to Lattimer, except to make him worried as always for the strength of the levees, but it still had a grating effect on Tomson. He snapped at Lattimer harshly, and then seemed to read a second meaning into the Resident's words.

He sat down slowly at the table. "You know," he said softly.

It was no good bandying words by this time. "Yes, I know," said Lattimer levelly. "You're no prospector, Jim. You're on the run from someone—at a guess, you stowed away on a Venus ship because Earth was considerably too hot for you. I've known it since you came here."

Tomson stared unblinkingly at him. "Why didn't you turn me in?" he said.

"And risk having you start a fight with me—or with the Service when they came to pick you up? Do you think I'm that crazy?"

"Spell it out," said Tomson coldly. "It's beginning to make a pattern—and a mighty dirty pattern at that. You're afraid to make yourself tough. You're scared of these black inhuman savages, aren't you? Why?"

Tiredly—he had had another long and complex case to solve at audience, and Chinsel was proving as difficult a chief as Miglaun had been—tiredly Lattimer said, "No, I'm not afraid of them. I'm afraid of myself."

"Obviously," sneered Tomson. "I've been here three months now, and I've seen that these natives are getting to think they're very smart. *Very* smart. They'll be setting up to rival men next. You're coddling them, when what they need is someone to take a strong line with them—teach them who is master. You even let them argue with you—I've heard you do it!"

Lattimer folded his hands to stop them trembling. "They are smart," he said with an effort. "They figure their ideas out for themselves. They understand things like soil

preservation and rotation of crops. Given another thirty to fifty years, and they'll be at the fertilizer level. They can work stone, they have fire—metal-working is only a few steps away. They're smart, all right."

"All the more reason to keep them down," said Tomson. "I know what I'd do if I were in your position. I'd keep them respectful, all right."

"Not for long," said Lattimer. He thought of other ways of solving the problem, but there remained only one that might work—and an appeal to a man like this would probably be wasted. Still, he had to try.

"You'd have learnt this tomorrow or the next day," he said. "It's worship day."

"What does that mean?" demanded Tomson.

"You and I are gods," said Lattimer soberly.

Tomson suddenly began to grin. "You mean that?" he said incredulously. "These creatures think we're gods? Well, isn't that just too sweet?"

"It's no joke," said Lattimer shortly. "It sure as hell is no joke at all. Have you ever tried to be infallible? To be just, merciful, humane, on top of giving advice on every kind of subject from civil engineering to agrobiology? It isn't easy."

Tomson wasn't listening. He was grinning widely as if he had just been struck by a wonderful idea. "Well, isn't that just perfect?" he said. "Boy, what a set-up! I'm a god!"

Lattimer looked at him calmly. "Yes. Up to now you've behaved more or less like one, too—at any rate you've been polite and careful. Keep it that way. We're the only driving force in these people's lives. Their only motive for good behavior is to please the supernatural beings who came on wings of fire from beyond the sky. We can't afford to be wrong, Jim—or we'd lose Venus."

"Lose Venus? To a bunch of performing seals?"

Lattimer nodded. "We depend on them—for food, for a labor supply. We need their co-operation. If once we fail from the role they've assigned to us, we can expect organized opposition."

Tomson hefted his blaster. "What can they do against human weapons?" he demanded. "We've got everything they haven't."

"You've seen a jume," answered Lattimer. "The natives have known how to deal with creatures bigger, faster and more dangerous than men for centuries. We, on the other hand, lost the whole of two expeditions through the jumes."

Tomson cut him short. "This is idiotic!" he declared. "I know what I'd do if I had a lot of savages calling me a god! I'd get some profit out of it. You're more a slave than a master."

"Not at all," said Lattimer. "I'm simply having to live and act like a

human being instead of an animal for the first time in my life. I'm having to keep my temper—to observe all the virtues—"

"Including chastity," said Tomson sourly. "Or doesn't it worry you?"

Lattimer half rose, his face murderous. As he fought to control himself, Tomson gestured significantly with his blaster. "I've—already killed a man," he said quietly. "They can't do any more to me for killing two."

The Resident sank back into his seat. "Your threats don't bother me," he said. "I'm going to give you a choice. I'm prepared to keep you here until I'm relieved—what you do then is up to you. You have not done me any wrong—yet. And, as I told you, I don't much like to tangle with the Service. They're one of my major liabilities in this job—they have a point of view too much like yours. But if you do one single thing to make this tribe distrust human beings—if you try to make capital for yourself out of your position—I'll either burn you down or turn you in."

He stared at the other man. "Is that fair enough?"

Tomson laughed and nodded.

It rained all that night and went on the next day. It was the longest single rain he could remember in three years, and the natives weren't interested enough in the past to recall a precedent. It was bad for the levees that held back the swamp-water from the reclaimed paddies, and those were spreading by degrees. He went out the following morning on a tour of inspection with Chinsel, and discussed strengthening them again. The rain welled wetly down his neck, and added to his miseries, but fortunately Chinsel was more co-operative than usual today, since his own reputation was largely founded on the building of the levees.

On his return to the village, Lattimer held a full audience and announced the postponement of worship day. He implied carefully that the gods were being kind to their people and thinking of their safety before their homage. The gesture was met with appreciative web-spreadings.

Instead of the ceremony, then, the following day—which was mercifully dry again—was passed by the adult members of the clan in packing tough young saplings and interwoven reed hurdles into the sodden earth of the dams to reinforce them. When night fell, Lattimer carried out a final survey and decided, regretfully, that it would have to do. He hoped that the rain would hold off long enough for the drainage system to clear the water down to a safe level.

But it set in again.

He was soaked and uncomfortable when he got back to the Residency, but the worry for the villagers' safety had displaced Tomson from his mind.

Now, though, he had to find the man engaged in trying to teach one of the younglings to fetch a stick. He sat in the partial shelter of the overhang of the stoep and tossed the piece of wood out into the muddy court. Obediently, but not understanding the reason for the action, the child was bringing it back to him.

Lattimer paused in the concealment of a clump of trees some way from the house. Tomson did it again. He cuffed the child when it did not run fast enough for his amusement. The poor beast was patently dropping with weariness.

Lattimer summed up the situation narrow-eyed. Then he drew his blaster. The next time the stick soared out, he destroyed it in mid-air.

Tomson, startled, leapt to his feet, and Lattimer showed himself. "I'll burn you where you stand if you make a move," he called in English. Then to the child he added, "Go home."

It scampered off as fast as its tired legs would carry it.

When it was out of sight, Lattimer walked slowly up to Tomson where he waited on the stoep. He kept his blaster aligned on the other's belly. When he came within speaking distance, he said, "What was the idea of that, Tomson?"

"I got bored," said Tomson softly. "So what?"

Lattimer reversed his blaster deftly and hit Tomson in the face, twice, with the rubber of the butt. The other staggered back, cursing, his hands clutching his cheeks.

"I warned you," said Lattimer. "That was for the beating you gave the kid. I'm going to turn you in."

Tomson mastered his pain and surprise. He dropped his hands again. "Seals have pups, not kids," he said. "So you think you're going to turn me in. You wouldn't leave your faithful followers on worship day, would you?"

"I'm not going," said Lattimer. "I'll call the Service."

"Well, isn't that interesting?" said Tomson. He backed before the muzzle of the weapon and went through the open door. He seemed strangely unconcerned at the threat.

As soon as Lattimer came inside, he realized where the other's confidence lay.

The radio was scattered in shards across the floor.

He lowered the blaster. "All right, Tomson," he said. "You've won one point. I should have blasted you earlier. You can think yourself lucky that I daren't start a fight where the natives can see you, or I'd give you the biggest beating you ever had. But worship day is tomorrow, and it's quite true that I can't leave now. However, I'm better off than you. You can't leave at all. You can't face the forest—especially not when another jume has ben reported from the foot of the ridge." He added this lie with a perfectly straight face.

"But the day after worship day," he finished, "you will be back at

the port and ready to be psyched. Clear?"

Tomson grinned insultingly. "As mud," he said blandly. "You're a bloody good liar, Lattimer."

"I'm not lying," said Lattimer, holstering his blaster. "By the day after tomorrow at latest, you will be ready for psyching."

He said it with a calm certainty that took the bluster out of Tomson's attitude and left him sullenly undecided.

They could not avoid each other in the narrow confines of the Residency. But avoidance was no part of Lattimer's plan. He kept Tomson carefully in sight for the remainder of the evening, and when the other had bunked down for the night he stealthily filched his blaster and stored the few remaining charges in his own ammunition belt, which he wore for the rest of the night. Now that the other had shown himself completely unreliable, there was no doubt left in his mind as to what to do.

But it was a long time before he fell asleep.

Sharply at rising time, Ris and Flaokh came together—worship day awakening was an honor not to be partitioned. He tried fiercely to conceal the tiredness consequent on his lack of sleep, and as he concentrated on acknowledging their greeting in the formal manner, he became aware that the rain was pelting down anew, and that the early chants of worship day were keening up from the village. The native music was odd to human ears, but he had learned to detect the somber grandeur of the ritual songs. Besides, ritual was the only occasion on which the entire tribe sang together.

Across the room, Tomson opened his eyes.

"You'd better get up," said Lattimer. "There isn't much time before the ceremony opens."

"You want me to come out and sit in the rain with a lot of seals staring at me?" said Tomson scornfully. "No, thank you! I'm staying right here."

He listened. "God, what a foul row!" he added. "What is it?"

"That's the morning hymn," said Lattimer. "I told you to get up!"

Tomson tutted gently. "It'd look awfully strange if you brought me down at the point of a gun, wouldn't it?" he said. "Have fun!"

"All right," said Lattimer calmly. He took a coil of the natives' tough fiber rope from a hook on the wall. "If you aren't coming now, I'll have to make sure you don't come at all." With a swift motion he twitched the light blanket from Tomson's body, and as the other sat up with a startled cry, he struck him on the temple with the butt of his blaster.

He bound and gagged the unconscious man with scientific thoroughness, leaving himself barely time to dress before the Awakeners returned to usher him down to the council square. He would be hungry before the day was out, not having

had time to eat his breakfast, but his own discomfort weighed lightly against the risk of leaving Tomson free. He managed to shield the unconscious body from the view of the natives when he let himself out to prevent them noticing him and wondering.

He took his place on the dais as for an audience without making any mention of Tomson's failure to appear. Let them reflect that the ways of gods were not those of themselves, he thought grimly. The ceremony began.

It was complex and highly symbolic, with the interminable ritual of the primitive. And always, there was the keening sound of the natives singing, singing . . .

The service wound on its slow way, each member of the clan making his personal devotion to the living god, and the rain thundered and drummed across the ground. Lattimer noticed anxious glances being exchanged between Chinsel and the elders, and the latter redoubled the volume of the song. This was without a doubt the biggest rain on record.

The ritual was barely halfway through—Chinsel had just risen to make formal acknowledgment of the tribe's debt to man—when he heard a sound which he had been subconsciously fearing he would hear ever since he took his place that morning. It filled him with sick horror.

He turned to see what he knew must be there. Tomson. And drunk.

The first-aid kit, thought Lattimer desperately. He remembered where I kept it. There was surgical spirit in the kit. He must have taken that!

The other man weaved an unsteady path down the track from the Residency, waving his uncharged blaster. He was shouting in the native tongue, the accent bad, but the meaning of his words unmistakable. "Stop this row! Stop it! You're driving me mad!"

Lattimer rose to his feet. The song died spasmodically away, while the elders looked for some proof that this was no more than a bad dream—that their gods had not failed them.

Lattimer wondered frantically how he was going to solve this one. In a few seconds, Tomson had undone three years' careful patient work; the clan would have to be wiped out to prevent the rumors spreading. How Tomson had managed to work free worried him, but he forced himself to disregard that while there was still a chance to answer the major question.

He was reaching slowly for his blaster to burn the drunkard down, when in the near-silence left by the cessation of the song he made out a sound which he could never have believed he would be glad to hear. It was a lurching, grinding, splashing sound, distinguished from the noise of the rain by its sheer volume.

The levees had broken!

Above its noise he shouted, "My

brother has come to warn us that the village is in danger! Stop the worship! The homage of my people is not to be placed above their safety!"

He confirmed the words by leaping from the dais and running towards Tomson. His blaster stuck in its sodden holster, but he wrenched it free. "All right!" he said softly, barely to be heard above the rush of water. "I've got you out of this one, Tomson—but that was your very last chance." He brought the weapon up under the other's chin, hoping that the blow would pass unnoticed by the crowd behind him, and Tomson folded tidily at the knees and waist.

"Ris! Flaokh!" shouted Lattimer.

The two Awakeners came running.

"My brother ran so fast to warn us of the levee breaking that he can go no further," he improvised hastily. "Take him to the Residency and place him on my bed. Then let all the clan gather there. The village will probably be destroyed."

He turned and watched the black figures rushing from the square to salvage a few precious belongings before the levee wall finally crumbled and drowned the whole low ground of the village.

It took barely ten minutes for the flood to finish its work.

Lattimer stood at the door looking out over the already subsiding waters. Three years' work—gone in a day, he thought. All the carefully reclaimed paddies of paplet, all the curra and most of the chirrits—all the houses except the Residency, and that lives only because it is a temple and is built on high ground. Another symbol in the complex of human deity; the temple becomes the sanctuary in time of trouble.

Beside him the natives watched the disaster. Some of them moaned quietly, but most of them watched in silence.

He turned at a slight noise and found Tomson sitting up. "What happened?" the man asked hoarsely.

Lattimer crossed the room to him, shoving the assembled natives aside. "You did your damnedest to wreck all I've managed to do here," he answered in English. "You tried to destroy what the natives looked to us for. If the floods hadn't stepped in, you and I would be dead."

Tomson tried his sneering grin again. His face was stiff, but his self-confidence made it half-successful. "You're a pretty smart guy, aren't you?" he said. "But it's still more than eighteen months before your relief calls for you, and I've still got my chance to have some fun out of being a god."

Lattimer shook his head. "I warned you," he said, "but you didn't believe me. You're going to be psyched, as I said."

There was a roar from outside, and the natives scrambled hastily to their feet to bow to the occupants of a mud-sled which came skidding and sliding across the sodden soil

at the edge of the forest and approached the door of the Residency. They wore the familiar uniform of the Service.

Tomson, stark terror gleaming in his eyes, stammered, "How did you call them?"

"You smashed the radio," said Lattimer. "I couldn't tell them I postponed worship day. I couldn't tell them whether the worship day service was correct, or whether the natives had started to suspect. If they ever do that, we shall strike. We may not be omnipotent or omniscient; to the natives we must appear to be both. Good-bye, Jim."

For the third time he hit the other man inconspicuously to keep him quiet, and turned to face the lieutenant in command.

"My people," said Lattimer, "the time has come for me to go from among you."

He looked around. Chinsel, in the front rank of the elders, was glowing with pride as one whose work in designing levees has been commended twice in his life.

For a few seconds Lattimer was silent, remembering. Ris was not there—nor was the former chief, Miglaun. The flood had taken its toll, as had the years. But the new paplet paddies were bigger than the old ones; the new levees were stronger, the village more numerous.

"But another has come who was with you before. He it was who warned you of the levee breaking in the time of the Greatest Rain. You knew me as Lattimer; you will know him as Tomson, my brother. Do for him as you have done for me. I have spoken."

He turned to the man who sat beside him on the dais as the song of welcome went up from the assembled tribe. He spoke almost under his breath.

"Good luck, Jim. But you won't really need it, I don't think. Did they tell you my story?"

Tomson nodded. "That's why I asked to come back here," he said. "They offered me a village further south a month ago, but I said I'd hold on."

Lattimer smiled reminiscently. "Psyching is quite a technique," he said. "I killed a woman once—I must have been more primitive than these people here. But psyching isn't enough by itself, unless you get the chance to show it's worked. This job gives you that chance. There's no other task which makes a man pay so much attention as trying to be perfect. And nothing makes a man mend his habits faster than having someone look up to him. You won't have any trouble from these people here—they're a good bunch. But watch yourself —that's the danger."

They shook hands. Then Lattimer turned and went across the fields to the waiting mud-sled, and Tomson spoke his first words of command to the people whose god he was.

Not a god, really. No. But a very much better man.

back to the drawing boards

by . . . Harlan Ellison

There were many who objected to giving it volition and the right of free choice—but these were shouted down.

PERHAPS it was inevitable, and perhaps it was only a natural result of the twisted eugenics that produced Leon Packett. In either case, the invention of the perambulating vid-robot came about, and nothing has been at all the same since.

The inevitability factor was a result of live tri-vid, and the insatiable appetite for novelty of the vid audience. If vid broadcasts came from Bermuda in tri-vid color with feelie and whiff, then they wanted wide-band transmission from the heart of the Sudetenland. If they got that, it wasn't enough; next they wanted programs from the top of Everest. And when they had accomplished that — God only knows how—the voracious idiot mind of the audiences demanded more. They demanded live casts from the Millstone, circling above the Earth; then it was Lunar fantasies with authentic settings . . . and Mars . . . and Venus . . . and the Outer Cold Ones.

Finally, Leon Packett stumbled upon the secret of a perfect, self-contained tri-vid camera, operating off a minute force-bead generator; and in his warped way, he struck instantly to the truth of the problem

Harlan Ellison, who will be remembered for his COMMUTER'S PROBLEM *(June 1957) and* SOLDIER FROM TOMORROW *(Oct. 1957) returns with this disturbing story of what happens to the perfect robot—and to the sick and unhappy man who is the inventor. Ellison is at present serving with the U. S. Army.*

—that the only camera that could penetrate to those inner niches of the universe that the eyes of man demanded to glimpse, was a man himself.

How completely simple it was. The only gatherer of facts as seen by the eyes of a man . . . were the eyes of a man. But since no man would volunteer to have his head sliced open, his brains scooped out, and a tri-vid camera inserted, Leon Packett invented Walkaway.

In all due to the devil, it was coldly logical, and it was a beautiful bit of workmanship. Walkaway had the form of a human being, even to ball-and-socket joints at the knees and elbows. He stood just under seven feet tall, and his hide was a burnished permanodized alumasteel suit. His hands could be screwed off, and in their stead could be inserted any one of three dozen "duty" hands, withdrawn from storage crypts, located in the limbs. His head was the only part of him that was slightly more than human. Brilliantly so, again offering Satan his plaudits.

Where the center of the face on a human would have been, the revolving lens wheel with its five turrets bulked strangely. Beneath the lens wheel a full-range audio grid lay with criss-crossed strangeness. The audio pickups were located on either side, as well as front and rear, of the head.

Two sets of controls were used on Walkaway. One set was imbedded in the right arm (and would snap up at the proper coded pressing of a lock-snit at the wrist) and was chiefly used by Walkaway himself when he was asked to play back what he had heard or seen.

The other console controls were in the back, and to my knowledge, were never employed after Walkaway's initial test runs. He disliked being pawed.

Naturally, the dissenters at Walkaway's birth, who declaimed the sanity of giving a robot volition and "conscience" with as much strength as his metal frame held, were shouted down. The creature—well, wasn't he?—had to have the right of free choice, if he was going to get the story in all its fullness and with a modicum of imagination, which the vid audience demanded.

So Walkaway was made more human.

He was able to disagree, to be surprised, to follow instructions *almost* as they were given, and to select the viewing subjects he wished, when he was filming. Walkaway was a most remarkable . . . what?

Creature.

"Leon, you've *got* to do it. Don't be obstinate, that's just being foolish. They'll get him somehow, Leon!"

Leon Packett spun in the chair, facing the window. His back was very straight, and his neck held a rigid aloofness. "Get out, McCollum. Get out and tell your pony-

soldiers to do the same. Leave me alone!"

Alan McCollum threw up his hands in eloquent frustration. "Lee, I'm trying to get *through* to you, for God's sake! All I ask is you listen to them, and *then* make a decision—"

Packett spun in the chair. His feet hit the floor with a resounding clump and he leaned one elbowed arm at McCollum. His index finger was an unwavering spear, the tip of which aimed between McCollum's sensitive dark brown eyes.

"Now look, McCollum. I spent fifteen years in a cellar lab, working what I could, and experimenting as best I could, soldering old pieces together because I couldn't get a Frericks Grant. Then I happened to think of putting two old gadgets together, and I came up with a miracle. Now I'm big time, and the Frericks Foundation uses me in their institutional advertisements."

His lean, horsey face was becoming ruby-blotched.

"But Walkaway is *mine,* McCollum! Mine! I dreamed him up and I sweated constructing him. I starved for fifteen years, McCollum. Fifteen. You know how long that is? While you and all your MIT buddies were piddling around putting chrome on old discoveries, I was missing all the good things."

McCollum's jaws worked. His eyes dulled with suppressed fury. "That isn't fair, Lee. You almost enjoy your misery, and you *know* it."

Packett stood up. His face was a crimson and milk patchwork. "Get out!" he snarled. His thin lips worked loosely, and his nostrils flared. "Get out and leave me alone. Walkaway is *not* going to Carina. Not Epsilon Carinae, not Miaplacidus, nowhere in Carina. Walkaway is staying here, where I can keep getting my commissions, where I can guarantee my future. It's been too dirty for me to start being patriotic now, McCollum, so you can trot out there and tell your Space Patrol buddies I'm not in the market."

McCollum was about to shout an answer, but he stood up instead. Stood up and stared at the contorted features of Leon Packett.

He turned and took three steps to the slidoor. With his palm—but not fingertips—fitted into the depression, he paused, and looked back at Packett. "There are doctors who can help you, Leon."

"Get out, you fool!"

A heavy plastex ashtray crashed into the wall beside McCollum's head. His fingertips touched and the door slid.

Perhaps he knew it was inevitable. The machinery he had always despised, now ground its wishes out in the dust of his ambitions. He had cursed the powers that had suffered by his own hand, and overlooked him. But now they wanted his vid-robot, his Walkaway. He knew they would reim-

burse him handsomely, but that was not what he sought.

Packett knew, and he moved to preserve his will, despite the loss of his invention. Late into the night he worked, on the smallest, most unnoticeable alterations in the printed circuitry of Walkaway's "mind" and "conscience." Late into the night on a space of plastex no longer than the surface of an eyeball. And when he fell into an exhausted sleep, as the daylight ribboned across the laboratory walls, Walkaway stood as he had stood.

Unchanged.

Apparently.

But changed.

Inwardly.

He managed to salvage his old age. By the simple expedient of refusing to allow ownership to switch from his hands—and after his death the hands of the Frericks Foundation—into the hands of the military, he preserved a hold on Walkaway. The Guard—his terminology "Space Patrol" had long since been aborted, despite the tabloid's efforts to keep it alive—were forced to hire Walkaway. They signed him on as a civilian employee, paid a monthly wage, a per diem remuneration, as well as travel expenses.

The wages were to be paid on demand, and books were kept by the Frericks Foundation, whose interest in Packett and Walkaway were more than merely scientific. With the world-famous Leon Packett associated with them, there could be no doubt about doles and grants. The Frericks Foundation had men at its helm whose interests penetrated into other fields than scientific: politics, finance, authority. The men were exceedingly careful to keep books.

The Guard's first enterprise in which Walkaway figured prominently was the remote from Bounce Point.

Bounce Point was the supersatellite constructed out beyond Pluto. It had been thrown up as the last outpost of Solar enterprise. Man's final touch with what was known, before he leaped off into the unknown.

From Bounce Point, great and silver and ebony in Pluto's sky, Walkaway was destined to begin the long ride out.

McCollum and his contemporaries had not been idle. While Leon Packett nursed his hatred of Authority and the Machine of Empire, they had been hard at work. The warp-drive was ready. Nuzzling the gleaming inner hull of its drive chamber, the warp-drive was larger than later models would surely have to be. It was a giant nest of power units, small inside larger, larger inside still larger, and finally, resting in a brace-socket at the tip of the final unit, a force-bead of incalculable power. That was the random factor. How hard could the warp-drive be pushed by this force-bead?

What were the effects on a man, sent through not-space?

For the test, what better guinea pig than a metal man with a camera face? In tri-vid, with audio pick-up, what better record could be offered for study?

The initial flight of W-1 to Carina, lost in the star heaps of space, would be accomplished with no human hand at the controls. The robot would take the bounce.

Leon Packett lay on a dirty bunk in a haven back of the Central Port space pads. The room was a flop, with the tackboard walls only stretching halfway to the ceiling. The other half of the wall was strand-wire, put in to offer a slight deterrent to thieves in the other cubicles, in no way to offer privacy. Packett lay on the bunk, a half-emptied bottle of Paizley's rigid between his side and his arm, held upright by his armpit. His long, almost oriental eyes were closed in stupor, and his horsey face was a Madame Toussoud wax reproduction. His breathing was irregular . . . when McCollum found him.

"Packett!" All civility was gone. There are worse things than insults. The insults had not alienated McCollum. The others had. "Packett! They want you. Get out, Packett!"

He dragged the bottle with its sour smell from Leon Packett's armpit, and threw it to the floor. Where the wrench of the bottle had not disturbed the drunken man, where McCollum's shot-like shouts had not roused him, the soft gurgling emptying of the bottle succeeded.

Packett came straight up on the bunk, hands in his wild hair, and he screamed. With eyes closed, with deep lined areas about the sockets, he shrieked. *"Let me alone!"*

Then he opened his eyes.

After he had sobbed, and dry-heaved, McCollum got him to his feet, and out of the filthy, wino-odored cubicle. There was a small argument about three days rent, with a ferret-like man behind the cage, but McCollum flashed over a five-note and they went into the street. Where the sounds of traffic overhead on the expressways deafened Packett, rising over him, like the spread, leathery wings of a pterodactyl, and dropped over him with suffocating strength. He tried to bolt back into the building.

McCollum was forced to hit him.

The hack ride was uneventful.

The Frericks Foundation rose alabaster on the third tier of the New Portion. McCollum would have paused to clean Leon Packett's face and innards, had not the Guard representatives spotted them as they left the hack at tier level. The gay uniforms of the Guard were ranked in the hall as McCollum steadied his sodden cargo into the building.

"My God, purulent!" one Guardsman snorted sourly.

"Is that Packett?" a dapper, balding Guardsman asked. His shoulders bore Commander boards. McCollum nodded. He tried to move past with Packett.

The Commander stopped them. McCollum explained, "He was on the Strip. He's not been well."

"Don't cover for him, McCollum. He's a waste, and there should be no glossing. The man is a waste. Can he talk?"

McCollum shrugged, still supporting Packett, whose legs were taffy. "I suppose. I don't know how much coherence you'll get out of him, but I suppose he can talk."

The Commander nudged a thumb toward a conference room. "Bring him along."

They started toward the room, and Packett began to blather. Even as they thrust him into a chair, his words fumbled and roiled. "They with power . . . laws and can't do, and do, and have this with what they let you do. *I* know! I've *al*ways known! The wheels with grinding down and they are afraid, so they rule you . . . rule . . ."

He went on ramblingly, almost semi-conscious, his words—more, his accents—tirades against authority and government. They had hampered him, but he would get even.

The Guard listened closely, for after all, this was Packett, the inventor of Walkaway. They listened, and finally, the Commander put his gloved hand, his crimson gloved hand, across Packett's mouth. "That will be enough, man," he deep-throated, with suppressed fury.

"Tell him what we want, McCollum," the esoteric purulent-caller urged the Frericks man.

McCollum's eyebrows went up and his lips thinned with resignation. The military never *could* pull its weight in these matters. "Leon," McCollum said, slipping to one knee beside Packett's chair. "Leon, they want to take Walkaway back to the drawing boards. They think he has too much initiative. Leon? Can you understand—"

"No!"

"No, by God, damn their eyes, *no!* Not a touch. Not a wire. Nothing! He stays as he is! If they want to use him, damn them they've robbed me of my fortune, now they'd pick my brainwork apart, no I say!"

They argued and pleaded and cajoled and screeched at him for the better part of five hours. But he was firm. He still owned Walkaway. The Frericks Foundation employed Packett by grant, but Walkaway was still his own, and when it came down to it, not a military personnel at all. Walkaway was a free entity. A bond slave of metal set free. If they wanted him to go to Carina—as Packett had resolved it to himself—he would go as he was now, today, now.

So the Guard had to accept it that way. They had to take Walkaway with his individuality . . . too much for a robot? And they had to send him on the first bounce to the

stars, as a metal man with thoughts of his own.

That was as it should have been.

For had not Leon Packett created Walkaway?

Had not Packett re-arranged the circuits to provide a hidden factor the Guard knew nothing about?

Had it not all been planned that way?

To results we know now.

The ship was crazily-shaped. It was a sundial. With a thick trunk, and two clear face-plates at either end. Great face plates of clear substance, through which Walkaway could train his turret eyes, and see the universe as it whirled by in not-space. The drive apertures were set at angles around the thick trunk of the ship, and there were no sleeping compartments, no galley, no chairs, nothing a metal servant would find useless.

The ship W-1 blasted free of Bounce Point on March 24th, 2111, its sole occupant a robot named Walkaway, whose face was a triple-turret tri-vid camera, and whose mind was the mind of a metal man with initiative. A certain initiative that only one man knew existed.

The ship left on March 24th. On March 31st, Leon Packett gripped a pair of heavy scissors and thrust them deep into his neck.

His will was a masterpiece of maudlin self-pity; but it released Walkaway from all human obligations, setting him *en toto* free. He was a singular now. Not an invention, but a civilian employee of the military Guard. He was to receive payment per diem for his work, and his accounts were to be handled by the Frericks Foundation.

Whatever Walkaway earned, remained his own.

The ship went out on March 24th, 2111.

It returned three hundred and sixty-five years later.

And the future began.

Oh, Lord! The records were covered with dust. But valid, that was the rub. The Frericks Foundation had sunk in its own mismanagement, and a pleasure sanctuary had risen on its whited bones. The New Portion was now called the Underside, for tiers had risen high on high to the fiftieth level above that tier. Now there was a planet-wide government, and the ship W-1 had become a legend. The robot Walkaway had become a myth. The ship had never been heard from again, and as will happen, with all cultures, time had passed the concept of star travel by.

There was a broken-nosed statue of Leon Packett on the third tier, many miles from where the Frericks Foundation had stood. A statue that called him one of the great inventors of all time and all Mankind. There were no scissors in the statue.

When the ship came down past the Moon, and its warning gear telemetered out the recog-signals, the Earth Central control tower was

lost in disbelief. A sloe-eyed brunette who was in charge of deciphering and matching recog-signals with the call letters of those ships out, called for a checker. Her section chief, a woman who had been on the job for eighteen years, matched the recog-signals, and turned to the younger girl with a word lost on her lips.

The call went in to Guard Central immediately.

They denied landing co-ordinates to the W-1 and held it aspace till they had found the records in the sub-cellar of the pleasure sanctuary on the third level. When they had the files, they knew the story completely, and they sent word to berthin the W-1.

Walkaway looked the same.

Huge and graceful, his face vaguely human, his body a sort of homo sapiens plus, he slid down a nylex rope from the cargo aperture of the sundial-shaped ship. He had not bothered to lower the landing ramp. As he came down the single strand, his metallic reflection shone in the smooth landing-jack's surface. The reflection of Walkaway shone down and down and over again down as he slid quickly to the pad.

They watched, as they might watch a legend materialize. This was the fabled robot that had gone out to seek the stars in Carina, and had returned. Three hundred and sixty-five years the W-1 had been away, and now it had returned. What would the vid-cameras of this perambulating robot show? What wonders awaited man, now that his interest was roused in the immensities of space? The Guard watched, ranked around the pad, as Walkaway slid down the nylex rope. The great sundial-shaped ship held high above them—unlike any other of the sleek vessels in the yard—tripod poised on its high-reaching legs.

Then the robot touched Earth, and a shout went up.

Home is the hunter, home from the hill . . .

Three hundred and sixty-five years. No one was left who remembered this creature of flawless metal. No one who had seen Walkaway go out on the shuttle to Bounce Point.

Bounce Point that was itself two hundred years dust. Gone in the struggle for the Outer Cold Ones.

The robot came across the pad, his shining feet bright against the blackened pad-rock, and his close-up turret ground near-to-silently away, taking in the reception ceremony for posterity.

Before the Guard representative could issue forth with the practiced phrases of a hundred other receptions, the robot said clearly, "It is good to be back. Where is Leon Packett?"

How strange it was—they said later—a legend stood asking them about another legend. Paul Bunyan inquiring after Zeus. What could they say? Few of them even knew of the man named Leon Packett.

Those who knew, were vague where he was concerned. After all, three hundred and sixty-five years. The Earth had changed.

"I asked: where is Leon Packett? Which of you is from the Frericks Foundation?"

There were no answers. And then someone in the front ranks of the Guard, someone who knew his history, said: "You have been gone three hundred years and more, robot."

"Leon Packett . . . ?"

"Is dead," finished the Guardsman. "Long dead. Where have you been so long?"

And a circuit closed as data was fed to Walkaway.

And the future was assured.

Loneliness. Leon Packett had done his work well. The attempts to take Walkaway back to the drawing boards would have shown them what Packett had done. He had freed the robot's soul completely. Not only legally, but in actuality. Walkaway felt great sadness. There had only been one other who knew his inner feelings. That had been Leon Packett. There had been empathy between them. The man a bit mad, the robot a bit man. They had spent evenings together, as two childhood friends might have; the man and the faceless metal creature, product of the man's mind. They had not talked much, but a word had brought understanding of concepts, of emotions:

"All of them."

The robot immobile, answering metallically, "Power."

"Somebody, someday . . ."

"Checks."

"Balances."

"Oh, Walkaway. Someday, just someday!"

"I know."

The nights had passed restlessly for Packett, while the sickness within him festered. The robot had been constructed in the image of the man. Seeing everything through its vid-eyes, hearing everything through its pickups, but saying little, working hard. Then Packett had known he would die, and Walkaway would live on. An extension of himself; the sword he would someday wield.

He had worked long into the night, foreseeing where others would not foresee, could not foresee, though they had the knowledge. For Leon Packett had been gifted. Sick, but gifted, and he had left his curse, left his justice, left his vengeance, to live on after he was gone.

Walkaway learned of Leon Packett's death, and the circuit Packett had tampered with, that he had wanted to close at the knowledge of his death, snapped to with a mental thud that only Walkaway felt, that the universe was soon to know.

The robot turned to the Guardsmen and made the one request no one would have considered, the one request that was his legally to make:

"Pay me my wages."

Three hundred and sixty-five years on Earth. Nine months and fifteen days in space. The warp-drive had been better than ghosts had thought. Memories of McCollum and his fellows from MIT lived within the force-bead, and had given it power. Better, far better, it had been, than their wildest imaginings. But Einstein had been correct. Mass, infinity, time zero. He had been correct, and Walkaway had earned three hundred and sixty-five years worth of wages. Per diem. Plus travel pay according to military regulations. They could not withhold it on grounds that he was using military transportation; Leon Packett had seen to that: Walkaway was a private citizen.

Plus interest accrued.

The sum was staggering. The sum was unbelievable. The sum could, would, *must* bankrupt the Earth government. It was unheard-of. The Prelate convened, and the arguments raged, but Walkaway needed no defense. He merely requested: "Pay me my wages." And they had to do it.

Oh, they tried to dodge their way out of it. They tried to ensnare him in legalities, but he was a man of alumasteel, and legalities could not affect him.

The circuit had closed, and his life's plan was set. In the mind of Walkaway burned the conscience and soul of his creator. Leon Packett was not dead. In his creation was re-born the intense, vibrant hatred of power and government and authority. In Walkaway was the perfect weapon; indestructible, uncaring, human as human it need be, inhuman as inhuman it *must* be, to bring about the downfall of that which Packett had despised.

Fifteen years in a cellar laboratory had carried forth for over three hundred years, and the future was molded on printed circuits.

Finally, they acceded. They paid him his wages. The government of Earth was bankrupted. The world belonged to a man of alumasteel. It was no longer Earth. Had he wished, he might have named it Walkaway's World.

For such it was.

Leon Packett had foreseen much. He had applied Einstein's equations, and he had known what would happen. The scientists of the Frericks Foundation had known, also, and they had considered it all. But the job had had to be done, in that era before Man had turned inward once more. They had feared what might happen, but not considered it an inevitibility. They had looked on it the way the farmer looks on earthquake. Yes, it might happen, but that would be an act of God, not a thing that must be.

But they had not considered Leon Packett. He had taken steps. He had altered his creation, and made it want its pay, when it knew he was dead. For dead he was dead, and alive he was dead. But in the soul of Walkaway he lived again.

So he had created an act of God.

Twisted in thought, crying in the darkness of his tormented mind, Leon Packett had changed the future. Changed it so irrevocably, evened the score so beautifully, Man would remember and curse and live with his name forever. They had known of the possibility, and they had tried to prevent it.

"Let us take Walkaway back to the drawing boards," McCollum—that shadow lost in the past—had cried. But Leon Packett had overruled him, "No!"

He would not let his name and his future be stolen from him. There was no need for him to go on living out a worthless life. That was bitterness. He had a tool that would and could and needed to drive forward to his ordained destiny. He had Walkaway, and though they suspected what might be, what could be, they never thought it *needed* to be. They figured without the drive and thirst of Walkaway's master. They figured without the hatred of a man for himself and for all other men.

Walkaway wanted his wages.

He got them, by getting the Earth.

There was not that much money in the world. Nor was there that much property. But there was the government, and soon Walkaway was the government.

That was the future Leon Packett built for himself, as the shrine of his memory.

Walkaway was not vindictive.

But Leon Packett was.

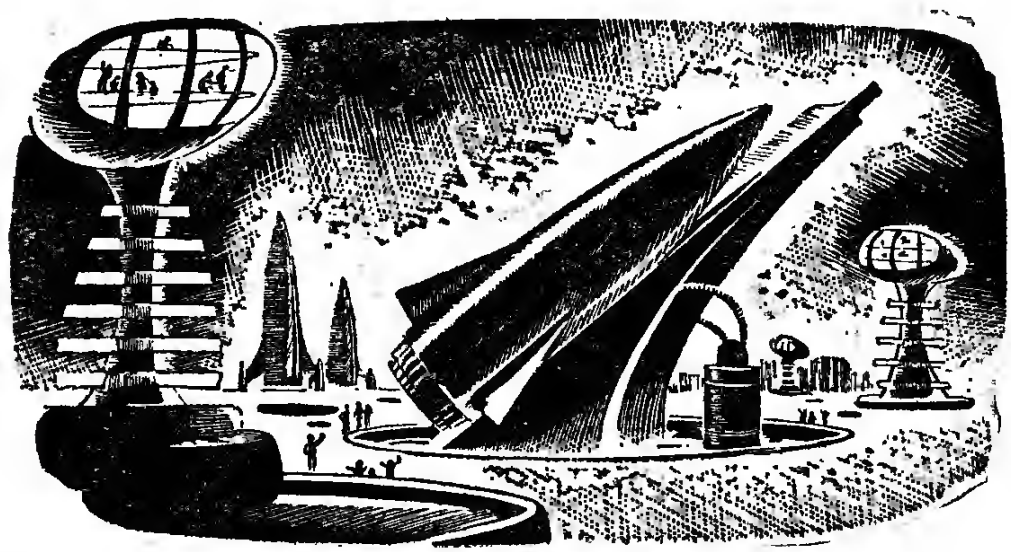
There haven't been many changes. Not many. Not for us. It has been the same for a very long time.

Walkaway was fair, and carried forth Packett's desires in the only way an alumasteel man could.

Changes? No, not many.

But you'll forgive me, of course. I must hurry now. I'm quite overdue.

I should have been at my lubrication hours ago.



report from brazil

by . . . Dr. Olavo Fontes

Another report on the little men who keep turning up in stories, here and abroad, of UFO landings. Who are they?

FLYING saucers do not exist . . .

The Air Force has told you that dozens of times. The scientists have already given a dozen or more different explanations, "proving" that most of the reports have been found to be caused by identifiable objects or phenomena. One of them even published a book about saucers —showing that, always, there is the simple, rational explanation. He didn't know perhaps that the story of science is full of simple, rational explanations of the same kind; those that are no more than beliefs. For example: the atom is a hard little particle like a marble, but unbelievably small; the meteorites are not stones fallen from the sky, because they obviously cannot float in the air and beyond the air there is the void; light and other radiations are carried by the ether, etc.

If you believe in Dr. Menzel or in Air Force statements, do not read this story. Because it is concerned with the strange events that took place on December 9 and 11, 1954, at the same hour, in Venancio Aires county, Rio Grande do Sul, in Brazil. There, two farmers who lived in the same area, walked into something unknown. They witness-

Dr. Olavo Fontes, Chief of the Gastro-Enterology Section, National School of Medicine, Rio de Janeiro, is a physician and surgeon who became interested in UFO some years ago. One of Brazil's outstanding saucer researchers, Dr. Fontes is associated with the Centro de Pesquisa dos Discos Voadores.

ed the landing of two of these "imaginary" saucers and met some "space-beings." In one of the encounters the "Visitors" seemed to be human—or almost. In the other, they were only humanoids, grotesque little men with no faces.

See if you can laugh about these "hallucinations."

On the evening of December 9, 1954, a farmer named Olmiro da Costa e Rosa, who lives in a place called "Linha Bela Vista," about two and a half miles from the town of Venancio Aires, Rio Grande do Sul, witnessed the landing of an alien craft on a cultivated field where he was working. What came next will be described in his own words, from his report to special investigators sent by the State Government. In the presence of the authorities, after a long interview, he told the following story (transcribed verbatim):

"On December 9, 1954, at 5:00 p.m., I was mowing in a French-bean and maize field when I heard a strange noise, resembling that of a sewing-machine. At the same time, the animals in the nearby pasture ran away hastily. Raising my body, bent over my hoe working on the ground, I saw a stranger. He was very near, just looking at me. Then I also noticed, at a small distance from the place I was, a craft shaped like an explorer's hat. It was of a cream color, protected by a kind of transparent smoke, and was not in contact with the ground. The unknown engine was stopped in mid-air, motionless, at about five feet above the ground. A strong smell was coming from it, a smell that can be compared to that of the smoke expelled by steam-locomotives using coal as fuel.

"It was then that I observed, behind the first man, two other human figures: one was inside the craft with his head outside; another was more distant, close to the fence, and apparently doing a careful examination of the barbed-wire. On the top of the craft I saw three holes, but I don't know how the two men came out because I didn't see it.

"I was scared. I tried to cry for help but no sound came from my throat. I couldn't even move my legs to run away, the fear was paralyzing. The hoe fell from my hands . . .

"The stranger made a greeting gesture, which looked like a military compliment, followed by a sad smile. Afterward, he kneeled down to get the hoe, looked at it from all sides, turning the tool deftly with the hands. After studying it carefully, he gave me it again, i.e., he placed again the hoe in my hands. Then, he picked up from the soil French-bean and maize plants (he rooted out a sample of each) and, without a word, left toward the craft—apparently no longer interested in my problems.

"Seeing that there was nothing to be feared, I controlled my nerves and walked toward the craft. But

my movements were attentively observed by the man who was inside the craft. He was watching me carefully all the time, but did nothing to stop me. But the other, the one who was still at the fence, more distant, made a negative sign toward me—clearly showing that I was not allowed to come closer of the machine. I stopped, of course, and decided to go toward the fence, to see what he was doing there. He was studying the wires with the eyes and fingers, making a careful examination.

"Some sheep that had run away at the beginning, were now coming back and approaching the place. I saw that the stranger was looking at them with a great interest. With words and gestures, I asked if he accepted one of them—as a gift. The stranger seemed to understand and answered with a negative sign.

"After this, I don't know how to tell, because things happened fast, but they went back to the craft, disappeared inside it—and suddenly I was alone. . . . The alien craft took off vertically, climbing up about thirty feet. Then it accelerated brusquely and flashed away obliquely through the sky, at great speed, vanishing toward the west.

"The three men can be described as beings of medium stature, broad-shouldered, blond and with long hair which blowed in the wind. The faces were so similar that they might be taken, easily, as twins. They didn't look like normal persons because of their slanted eyes and their pallid faces. The pallor of their skin was so intense, in fact, that their faces looked like those of "corpses." They appeared, however, to be strong.

"These strange men were dressed in light brown clothes, which were one-piece garments like overalls, or uniform. The trousers were close-fitted and seemed to be linked with the shoes. The shoes were odd; they had no heels—the footprints they left in the earth showed this clearly.

"The whole thing lasted approximately five minutes. The alien craft was large and might have, perhaps, a diameter of about fifty feet. It appeared to be made of a yellow metal, very light (in color), and shining brightly (in spite of the yellow color).

"After the take-off, I searched the ground at the area above which the craft was stopped all the time. I found nothing.

"The smell of burning coal (fossil-coal) remained, for some time, in the air after the craft's departure."

Mr. Olmiro, who was fifty years old, was interviewed for several hours by the authorities that had traveled from Porto Alegre (the State capital) to investigate the incidents (see also incident 2). He was able, however, to relate the sequence with apparent accuracy and obviously was telling the truth (or what he thought to be the truth). It was found that he had never read science fiction (he read

with great difficulty). He had never heard about flying saucers, "space beings" from Venus or other planets, etc. At least he said so, showing a great surprise when asked about these matters. Apparently he didn't understand these questions. He seemed to believe that the "visitors" were persons from some other country.

The "Asapress" put the story on its wires a few days later, and it was printed on December 14 in the "Diario Carioca," one of Rio's newspapers. On January 15, 1955, the reporter João Martins (one of our best UFO-investigators) published in the magazine "O Cruzeiro" an excellent report about the incident, including photos of the witness at the place of the sighting.

INCIDENT 2—It happened two days later, at the same hour and in the same area as incident one; this time the witness was another countryman, Mr. Pedro Morais, who lived at less than one mile from Mr. Olmiro da Costa's place. This man had never attended school and didn't even know the alphabet. Because of his ignorance, it was hard to get a coherent narrative about the facts he had witnessed. He said that he didn't know what had happened with the other man, just two days before. It had been only on December 13—two days after his own experience—that he was informed about the other case. The weird story he told to the State authorities, when interviewed by them, was the following (transcribed verbatim):

"On December 11, 1954, I had decided to purchase some foods at a nearby warehouse. At exactly 5:00 p.m., when I was preparing to make the trip, I heard the frightened cries of a chicken. Thinking it might be a sparrow-hawk, I went outdoors to see what was happening. The day was very hot. There was no wind and I saw nothing in the cloudless sky. I still heard the chicken but couldn't find it—because I found another thing that made me forget the original purpose of my search. . . . I saw a strange object suspended in the air, hovering, making a noise like that of a sewing-machine and exhibiting an agitated oscillatory movement. It was shaped, it appeared to me, like the hood of a jeep, on the top; and like an enormous, polished, brass kettle, on the lower part.

"When my eyes left the strange craft, turning toward the cultivated fields, I noticed two figures of human shape that were walking through the tobacco-plantation. I didn't like that, and began to walk toward the machine to ask for an explanation about that invasion of my fields. One of the figures was watching my acts and immediately raised one arm, motioning me not to come any closer. Of course, I didn't obey the sign to stop and continued to walk toward the craft. Seeing that I was approaching rapidly, the figure that was at a distance of about ten yards started

to run toward the craft. Meanwhile, the one that was near the craft kneeled down swiftly and picked up a tobacco-plant from the ground (I saw later that the plant had been rooted out abruptly). They entered together into the object, which disappeared in the sky in a few seconds."

Pedro described the beings as about four feet tall—the size of a ten-years' child. "The figures were human only in the shape of the head and body. All the time, I concentrated my eyes upon their faces, but I didn't see the eyes, the nose, the mouth and the ears. There was nothing of the kind, no face was visible. I got the impression that they were placed into a kind of sack (or bag) of yellow color, which enveloped their bodies completely, from the head to the feet."

He failed to notice any smell or special odor coming from the craft. After the incident, he searched carefully the ground where the figures were walking—but found no footprints or tracks. The tobacco-plant, however, was gone; there was only an empty hole in the earth. . . . Thus, it was not a dream—it had really happened.

Knowing nothing about flying saucers and about "little men" stories, Pedro thought at first, in his ignorance, that the beings might be saints or ghosts. But later, when others told him that the Government wanted one of those "men" live or dead, he decided to shoot one of them with his gun to get a reward—if they appeared again.

This incident was not printed in the newspaper. However, like the other, it was included in Mr. Martins' article about UFOs, together with four photos of Pedro Morais. In one of them he showed the UFO's landing place; in one of the others he showed the empty place corresponding to the tobacco-plant picked up by the "little men."

These cases are not, obviously, contact reports. As a matter of fact, I have rejected all cases involving alleged two-way communication between earth-people and "space-people." Obviously they are such clear fakes they are not even worth considering. On the other side, however, there are other reports of encounters with "space-people," not involving communication, which show common characteristics that set a definite pattern for the whole group. In fact, they all present the same strange but definite characteristics. The number of such cases is not yet large enough, in my opinion, to be accepted as evidence—but these reports are extraordinarily interesting and should, at least, be analyzed and investigated. A scientific evaluation of the whole group could be of interest some day in the future.

The pattern that identifies this type of report was recently established by Miss Isabel L. Davis from C.S.I. of New York, in a wonderful article that should be read by all UFO researchers. Miss Davis show-

ed* that this pattern includes the following characteristics: (1) The "space-people" appearance is humanoid, not super-human; their behavior is quite incomprehensible; and they never *communicate* at all (they utter no lofty messages, no explanations of ancient riddles, no admonitions, warnings, reassurances, prophecies, or esoteric doctrine); even when they are said to "speak," what they say is as unintelligible as what they do; (2) These encounters are always unexpected by the human being or beings involved; they are *never* "alerted" by mental telepathy or other ESP powers to the fact that they are going to "have a contact"; (3) The witnesses are always terrified, or baffled and annoyed, during and after the experience; they wish it had never happened at all, and the last thing they want is any repetition of it; (4) Where the "contactees" are obscure before the event and increasingly well-known afterwards, these other people are only too glad to go back, once the nine days' wonder and scoffing is over, into the same obscurity they enjoyed before their distasteful experience; (5) They write no books, give no lectures, attract no defenders or disciples, found no cults; (6) In both types of meeting the public is highly skeptical; but these people retreat into silence or resentment, or both, in the face of ridicule; while the "contactees" are so fascinating, so talkative, and so persistent, that eventually they acquire a private following all their own, in whose breathless belief they can bask and ignore scoffing unbelievers.

Both cases (described here) present all these six common characteristics. There is, however, a seventh —maybe the more important. These reports are *always* "little men" stories, as in incident 2. But incident 1 was not of this kind. This is the most disturbing fact in the whole story, chiefly because the two incidents are obviously related with each other. They occurred in the same area with a two-days' interval, at the same hour; the two crafts were almost identical; there was the same strange "sewing-machine sound"; the "space-people" purpose seemed to be similar in both cases, etc. Too much to be only a coincidence. . . . Then, how to explain the extraordinary difference in their physical appearance? Did they belong, perhaps, to two different races from one single species, living on the same planet? Or were they different humanoid species from the same or from different planets? Were they allied and obeying to the same command? Why were the "little men" using "space-suits"?

I don't know, I have no answer for any of these questions. Another mystery for the UFOs files. . . .

Of course, it would be easier to discard incident 1—as an hoax. The "long blond hair" of the strangers, as well as their clothes, seem to suggest a distorted version

Meet the Extraterrestrial. (Fantastic Universe, November 1957.)

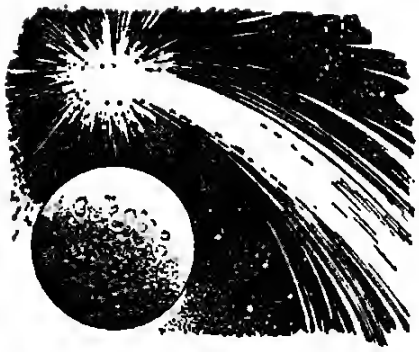
of Adamski's Venusian boy. But only that. On the other side, how to explain the words "protected by a kind of transparent smoke" coming from the mouth of an ignorant countryman? How could he describe with such a clarity a phenomenon obviously related with the presence of a powerful force field (probably an electro-magnetic field) around the craft? How could he know about this? Surely there is something very odd in this incident. I would like to know what that "something" is.

Anyway, the official investigation didn't uncover any evidence suggesting that the witnesses could be hoaxers, pathological liars, crackpots or mystics. The two cases are still classified in the Brazilian AF's files as *unsolved*. A particular investigation made by the reporters João Martins and Licurgo Cardoso (from the magazine "O Cruzeiro") showed the same results.

Rumors about a third landing report, still in December, 1954, came from the State of Rio Grande do Sul. This case, it was said, had happened soon after the two other (less than ten days after incident 2, close to the town of Cachoeira do Sul. According to that rumor, a Police Inspector living in that town organized a hunt, together with several friends, which had been started early on the morning. They had entered into the nearby forest and then, at the border of a clearing, they had sighted a strange disk-shaped craft. "The UFO landed quietly and two 'men'—with long, blond hair over the shoulders—came out from it and walked towards the hunters. The friends ran away, scared, but the Inspector decided to wait. The 'beings' came in his direction. To avoid any surprise, he got his gun and prepared to fight for his life—if necessary. But it seems that the sight of that gun pointed towards their bodies frightened the strangers, who went back rapidly to the craft; and the UFO took off in a few seconds, and disappeared in the sky."

During the investigation of this strange tale, I learned that the case had been reported through several radio Stations in the State, but did not appear in the press. I was informed that an AF officer had been sent to Cachoeira do Sul, to make an investigation, but nothing had been said about the results of it. For a long time, in the hope of getting something more solid (in order to confirm or deny this story), I worked on the case. But all my efforts failed. I did not uncover any reliable information about it.

I believe, now, that there is nothing to be trusted in this story because, unlike the two other incidents, it was not investigated by the State authorities. If it had been, I would certainly be informed about it. Thus, this report probably was obviously inspired by the story told by Mr. Olmiro da Costa e Rosa, which was published in the papers at the same occasion.



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shapes in the sky

by . . . Civilian Saucer Intelligence

A discussion of hitherto unsuspected UFO flyways and their behavior in keeping to certain lines.

IT MUST have occurred to many students of flying saucers that their research seems to make singularly little *progress*. We are now entering the twelfth year of the UFO era; what have we learned from the tens of thousands of sightings reported during the past eleven years?

The list of discoveries is short, and shorter still when we consider that most of the phenomena now familiar to UFO students, and several of the theories now advanced to explain them, were first described by Charles Fort long before 1947. In a future article we intend to review the advances in "UFOlogy" since Fort's time; although they are significant, it can hardly be claimed that our infant science has grown with breakneck speed. For something really new to be discovered about UFOs is no everyday occurrence.[1]

But this rare event did take place last year. Something that no one else had ever observed was discovered by Aimé Michel, the French acoustic engineer and UFO researcher, author of *The Truth About Flying Saucers* (Criterion Books, New York, 1956). He calls

Civilian Saucer Intelligence of New York discuss, in their latest monthly column—written especially for this magazine, a particular behavior of the saucers which Aime Michel, author of the forthcoming FLYING SAUCERS AND THE STRAIGHT LINE MYSTERY *(Criterion Books) described as "orthoteny."*

this something "orthoteny" (pronounced or-THOT-e-ny), and he discovered it almost accidentally while he was studying the great French sighting wave of the fall of 1954. In the behavior of these flying saucers he was able to demonstrate a simple but surprising pattern.

On September 24, 1954, a number of saucer observations were reported in France. At Vichy, in the center of the country—the city that was the nominal capital of the country during the occupation years—football players and their audience saw a cigar-shaped object cross the sky during the afternoon.

At Gelles (department of Puy-de-Dôme) in the early evening, a luminous cigar crossed the sky.

At Ussel (department of Corrèze), late in the evening, a red-luminous object approached so close that M. Elie Cisterne jumped off his tractor in terror and "hit the dirt." The object hovered for several minutes before speeding off again—hovered so low that it scorched all the topmost leaves of an ash tree directly beneath it. There were confirmatory witnesses.

At Tulle (Corrèze), about the same time, a draftsman saw a rapidly-moving reddish object which he was able to follow for some minutes with binoculars.

In the village of Lencouacq (department of Landes), shortly after sunset, Mme. Vignolles saw a luminous object arrive at a very low altitude, hover for several seconds just above the ground, behind the rectory, and then start off again at high speed.

And at Bayonne, in the southwestern corner of France, during the afternoon, many people saw three elliptical, metallic-looking objects which remained motionless in the sky for about a minute before departing rapidly.

What makes these six reports on a single day so remarkable? Not their details, certainly, for all of them except Ussel were run-of-the-mill UFO observations. But when Michel pinpointed these six sightings on the map of France, a striking relationship emerged: all six of them lay *on one straight line.* A line drawn from Bayonne in the southwest to Vichy in the center of France—a distance of 300 miles—also passed through Gelles, Ussel, Tulle, and Lencouacq.

To complete the picture, one more fact must be mentioned: there were only three other saucer observations in France that day.

Now what is the probability that six out of nine points on a map just *happen* to lie along a straight line? Michel, by comparing areas of actual and possible distribution, estimated the probability as less than 1 in 200—probably very much

[1]This generalization excludes, of course, the numerous accounts of persons who claim to have had extensive communication with extraterrestrials and to have received from them full information about UFOs. These "discoveries" based on alleged personal revelations are not to be classed with observations of an objective and factual nature and reasoned deductions therefrom; they are chiefly or wholly the products of imagination.

less. Using a different method, we have figured it as less than 1 in 500,000. There is no hard and fast "right answer" here. The probability depends, for one thing, on how precise the straight-line alignment is. For these sightings of September 24 the precision is great; in fact, an estimate of 1 in 10,000,000 would probably be closer than 1 in 500,000.

Obviously, this straight line was decidedly not the result of pure chance. We can also rule out another explanation: the line certainly did not represent the path of some one object traversing the country that day. Not only were the details of the sightings different (for example, three objects were seen at Bayonne, one object elsewhere), but the sightings were made over a period of several hours, and not in the order in which the towns occur on the line.

All during the fantastic saucer "invasion" of France in the autumn of 1954—without doubt the most spectacular period in UFO history—this theme of the straight line is repeated. The lines were not permanent; the pattern seemed to change about midnight or shortly thereafter each night. For whatever mysterious reasons of their own, the UFOs that frequented the sky of France in such numbers in late 1954 restricted themselves almost entirely, with more than military discipline, to travel along sharply-defined straight-line paths.

These hitherto unsuspected flyways of the saucers are technically not true straight lines, but segments of "great circles" on the sphere of the earth. Michel has invented for them the new term "orthotenic lines" (from the Greek ortho-, meaning "straight," and *tenein,* meaning "stretch" or "extend"). And the peculiar behavior of the saucers, in limiting themselves to these lines, is "orthoteny."

The theme of orthoteny pervades Michel's new book,[2] which is the first complete account to appear in English of the 1954 wave in France and western Europe. He describes dozens of extraordinary cases as they were reported day after day: showers of angel hair, landings of objects that left evidence in the form of scorched vegetation and marks on the ground, stalled cars, paralyzed witnesses, dumfounded peasants (and others) who encountered creatures not wholly human. But among these astonishing reports, and others of a more "ordinary" kind, day after day there appeared on the map of France the cryptic orthotenic alignments.

Consider another day, for example—September 27.

That afternoon, around the Mediterranean resort of Perpignan in southernmost France, near the Spanish border, there were many reports of disks. A high school boy there never got to school. He said

[2] *Flying Saucers and the Straight-Line Mystery*, by Aimé Michel (New York, Criterion Books, to be published in May or June 1958); translated and edited by the Research Section, Civilian Saucer Intelligence of New York.

he had seen a round object land in the road; two grotesque little creatures emerged, but after a few minutes re-entered the object, which flew off. The boy may have been a joker; nevertheless he appeared to a doctor to be in such a state of shock that absolute rest was prescribed.

At 2:30 in the morning before these events, near Foussignargues in the department of Gard, Mme. Julien and her son Andre had been walking home when they saw a red-luminous object disappear behind a hill; the friends whose car they had just left also saw the object from the automobile. Ten minutes later Mme. Louis Roche, living close by, went out on her terrace and was stupefied to see something "like a luminous tomato" sitting beside the road a hundred yards away. "Five or six rather thick little stalks came out of the center of it on top." She waked her husband, who confirmed that she was not dreaming. It was still there an hour later, but was gone by dawn. Neither of them had dared to approach it.

At 10:15 p.m. a farmer of Lemps, 12 miles north of Valence, called his daughter to watch a green light zigzagging about in the south; it finally traveled to the northeast and disappeared. It was followed by something like "a curtain of luminous smoke," which came close enough for them to hear a humming sound, and disappeared in its turn to the northeast. Half an hour later, they saw nearly a dozen luminous objects congregate in the southeast, then head away to the northeast, "crossing and recrossing each other's paths." Finally a party of three stragglers assembled and brought up the rear of the strange procession. From Valence, south of Lemps, these "swarming" objects were also seen, to the north.

At 8:30 p.m., in the mountain hamlet of Prémanon near the Swiss border, four children were playing in a barn when their dog began to bark. Raymond Romand, 12, the eldest, went out and was confronted by a rectangular metallic object, in shape "like a sugar lump standing on end and split at the bottom," which had not been there before. It did not occur to the boy at the time that this enigmatic object might be a living creature. He tossed some pebbles at it, which bounced off with a tinny clink, and shot a rubber-tipped toy arrow at it. Then he went up to touch it—and was flung to the ground as if by "an ice-cold invisible force." Fear came then, belatedly, and he ran back into the barn with a cry of terror. All the children saw the "thing" move off with a waddling or swaying motion; and as they fled to the farmhouse, they all saw a big red luminous ball balancing a few feet above an adjacent meadow.

Investigators the next day found that in a circular area 12 feet in diameter the grass had been pressed flat in the pattern of a counter-clockwise vortex; within the circle were four triangular holes arranged

in a square. Those who investigated the case (including the police) were unanimous in rejecting the suggestion of a hoax. None of the children had ever heard of flying saucers; in first telling of their experience—after urging by their school teacher—they said they had seen a "ghost."

Later that night, at Rixheim in northeastern France, two people watched through binoculars "a long cigar-shaped object, motionless in the sky, around which ten or more luminous points were maneuvering in every direction."

On a large map of France, draw a straight line from Perpignan to Rixheim. This line passes through Foussignargues, passes southeast of Lemps at a distance of a couple of miles, and passes through Prémanon. Five points aligned—three of them landing reports.

What about the other sightings of September 27? There were three: about 10 p.m., a group of observations in eastern Paris of a "neon-lighted" disk that paused and then went off to the northwest; at 1:15 p.m., a shiny object that moved off to the northwest in successive jerks, seen by M. and Mme. Kapps at Froncles, 130 miles east-southeast of Paris; at 8 p.m., a red-luminous disk moving to the south, seen by three witnesses at Lanta, near Toulouse in southwestern France. When we go to the map, we find that the Paris and Froncles observations are also directly aligned with Rixheim. So, of the eight observations of the 27th, no less than seven belong to this pair of orthotenic lines radiating from Rixheim. Only one, that of Lanta, stands solitary upon the map.

As September passed into October, day by day the number of sighting reports multiplied, and so did the number of orthotenic lines on the map of France. The pattern for October 2 resembles the spokes of a giant spiderweb, with all but two lines meeting in the village of Poncey-sur-l'Ignon, near Dijon; while the pattern of 28 sightings for October 7 bears much resemblance to a map of the canals of Mars.

Actually, however, these later days with many sightings forming complex orthotenic networks furnish less conclusive evidence for orthoteny than do days with few sightings, all or nearly all of which turn out to lie along orthotenic lines. This is because of the curious fact—predicted by theory and easily verified by actual trial—that the number of purely accidental alignments among a group of points scattered at random increases rapidly with the number of points.

If you scatter six radish seeds (for example) over a sheet of paper, the chances are poor that any three will lie in a straight line. If you use nine seeds, you will find among them, more often than not, one accidental three-point line; with eleven seeds you will probably find two such lines; and so on. If you scatter 28 seeds, our home-made

theory predicts that you will find (if you are patient with the ruler) something like 30 three-point alignments, and 3 four-point alignments, all purely accidental. We have tried this repeatedly, with approximately these results.

But there is one striking difference between these "pseudo-orthotenic" lines and any of the sighting patterns found by Michel: namely, the *kind* of pattern produced. A pattern consisting of these pseudo-orthotenic lines produced purely by chance gives an effect of confusion; it is haphazard, jumbled, and unsystematic in a way that the true orthotenic pattern is not.

Michel draws other generalizations from his data, and some of them can be related to the orthotenic lines. A type of UFO which Michel calls "the great cloud cigar" was often seen. As its name indicates, it was an elongated object that appeared to be surrounded by cloud, smoke, or vapors. From this "cigar" there frequently emerged smaller objects; in other cases the smaller objects were seen entering it; in at least one case the same object left the cigar and returned. Unmistakably this represents a form of the "mother ship" which has become such a familiar concept in UFOlogy.[3]

Sightings of the great cloud cigar were made chiefly at places where orthotenic lines met or crossed each other; Michel calls these points "dispersion centers," since they seemed to be "junctions" from which smaller UFOs departed, or to which they returned, along the orthotenic lines.

If the saucers flew in these strangely rigid orthotenic patterns over France in 1954, do they always do so? What about other countries and other sighting waves? The November 1957 wave in the United States, which took place while we were translating Michel's book, offered a golden opportunity to find whether American observations would also conform to Michel's orthotenic principle. We plotted the November sightings on a gnomonic-projection map of the United States (this projection, available from the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, is needed for large areas, though not for a smaller area like France), and linear patterns *did* appear. But we found none that were clearly distinguishable from pseudo-orthotenic patterns. Does this mean that orthoteny was not operating in the United States in 1957?

Not necessarily. If all of the numerous erroneous "sightings"—of Venus, for example—could have been recognized as such and subtracted; and if the numerous cases that never came to our attention could have been added, we might have seen clear-cut orthotenic patterns rather than mere tantalizing suggestions.

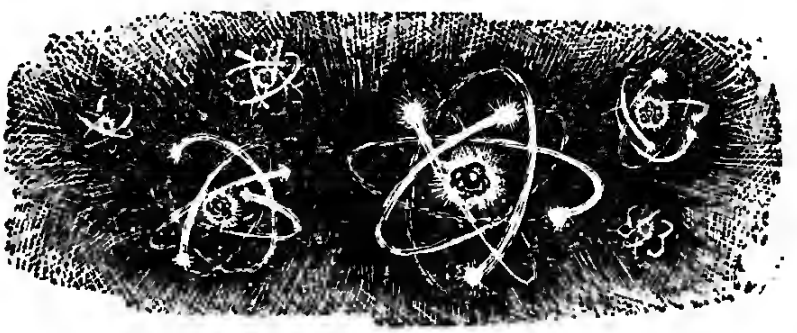
Or perhaps the United States

[3] This idea is often associated with Adamski's spurious photographs, but he was by no means its inventor; it was in circulation as early as 1948.

saucers of 1957 were really a different breed of cat from those in France in 1954, or perhaps in 1957 they were no longer operating under the orthotenic system. There is plenty of precedent in UFO history for inconsistent behavior of this kind; as we have emphasized in previous articles, the things seem to take positive pleasure in violating generalizations about what they always do, or never do, or usually do.

And yet, the similarities between 1957 and 1954 were startling. For example, the electrical effects first reported in France in 1954 turned up again in many (but not all) of the 1957 sightings in this country —sightings made, we might add, by people who could not conceivably have known of the European phenomena three years before. On both sides of the Atlantic, the UFO that produced these effects was described with impressive unanimity as luminous neon-red and egg-shaped.

Whether or not flying saucers still operate under the "laws of orthoteny," the occurrence of these orthotenic lines in France in 1954 seems indisputable, and what has happened once will probably occur again. They constitute one more baffling riddle for UFOlogists—all the more tantalizing because, as Michel points out, they may contain, in plain language of their own, some vital clue that we are as yet unable to decipher.



MOTHER SHIPTON

Four hundred years ago, Martha ("Mother") Shipton, who lived between 1488 and 1561, prophesized:

Carriages without horses shall go,
And accidents fill the world with woe.
Around the world thoughts shall fly,
In the twinkling of an eye.
Under water men shall walk,
Shall ride, shall sleep, and talk.
In the air men shall be seen
In white, in black, and in green.

benefactor

by . . . George H. Smith

He clutched at the lever with more force than he'd intended. It was set for further in the future. . . .

"THEY'RE crazy! They're insane! That mob outside is made up of madmen," Jacob Clark told his young assistant, Bill Towney.

"They'll be battering at the door any minute now, sir," Towney said nervously.

"But why? Why are they doing it? My inventions have advanced the world a hundred years. I've always been a benefactor of man, not a destroyer."

"It's the robots. People are in a rage because they say the robots cause unemployment by replacing workers."

"It's utter nonsense, you know," Clark said impatiently. "Why can't they see that my intelligent, self-controlled robots are the greatest boon the human race has ever received from one man?"

"I don't know, sir, but they don't." Towney paused as the shouting and pounding outside became more intense. "They demanded that you take the robots out of the labor market and order your factories to stop making them. This is the result of your refusal."

"DOWN WITH CLARK! DOWN WITH THE TIN MEN! DEATH TO THE ROBOT

We can anticipate that robots will be fiercely resented, at first, in a society that will see them as the latest—and an indestructible—widespread threat to the workers whom they will replace. The men who will seek to alter the status quo will be called "robot lovers" and stoned. But what happens next?

LOVERS!" The furious mob was battering at the door now.

"Really, sir," Towney said, "You should leave here. They'll kill you if you don't!"

"Leave here? I should say not. I'll defy the fools. I'll tell them what I've done for them and make them understand." He glanced nervously at the door. "Besides there's only one door. I couldn't get away now."

"There's the time machine, sir."

"But isn't there some other way? Perhaps if you went out and talked to them. . . ."

"You know there's no other way. Those people believe you've brought disaster to the human race and they mean to kill you. And if you don't hurry they will," Towney said urgently. "The time machine is set for twenty years in the future. Please hurry, sir!"

The door was beginning to give. Clark looked around unhappily and then walked to the time machine. "All right, I'll go. In the future I know the results of my work will be appreciated. I'll be a hero and benefactor of mankind."

Towney heard the door crash and roughly pushed his employer into the time machine as the mob burst through. "Push the starting button, push the starting button. Quick!" he screamed as the first of the mob reached him.

Clark's hand leaped to the control lever just as a brick crashed into his head. His hand completed its motion with more force than he had intended as he sank unconscious to the floor and the machine was set for a thousand years in the future instead of twenty.

The year three thousand had been a brilliant one for the robots, in fact, the most brilliant since the last human being had died some five hundred years before. They had reached Venus and Mars and were now planning a trip to Jupiter. And this very day, a huge statue of Jacob Clark, the creator and benefactor, was to be dedicated on the site of what once had been his laboratory. It seemed a shame that most of the records concerning him and his time had been lost in one of the great wars that had helped to extinguish the humans. The statue though was good for surely he looked like a robot. One of the few humanbooks still in existence said that the Creator had created in his own image.

It was right at the foot of his own statue that the Guardians of the Shrine found Jacob Clark. They picked up his unconscious, bleeding body and laid it tenderly on a nearby bench. They bent over him with all the gentleness and solicitude that had been installed in his very first models and had been handed down from generation to generation of robots. They wanted to help him but they were very puzzled.

"Perhaps it came from a far part of the earth," one of them said.

"Or maybe a mistake was made

at one of the birth factories," said another. "See it is loosing oil at a great rate."

"Perhaps," mused the elder, "it is a new model. At any rate it is a robot and has been damaged. As our great creator taught us, he must be aided. We will take it to the central repair factory in the city."

"But," the first robot protested, "it's awfully bulky to be carried so far."

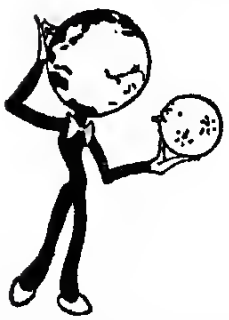
Being creatures of logic, they thought about it for a moment and then the elder came to a decision that was both effective and reasonable.

"Since he is so bulky, we will disassemble him for transportation purposes," he said as he leaned over and gently twisted off Clark's right arm.

"Rather primitive and messy construction, I'd say," said the second robot as he tenderly unscrewed Jacob Clark's head from his body.

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universe in books

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

Comments on recent novels, a report on a recent SF fan conference and remarks on various other matters.

Now that the secret of the Saucers is out—and we all know that Orphan Annie's one and only Daddy Warbucks flies around in one—we can perhaps all breathe more easily. . . .

Robert Silverberg's latest novel, INVADERS FROM EARTH (Ace Double Books, 35 cents) explores a possibility that must be recognized in these days when Madison Avenue, with or without subliminal advertising, has already become such an important factor in our lives. Ganymede, one of the moons of Jupiter, has been found to have intelligent life—and also to be extremely rich in radioactive minerals. The Extraterrestrial Development and Exploration Corporation needs public support for the taking over of Ganymede. Steward and Dinoli is to create that public support. Ted Kennedy, of S & D, handles an important aspect of the resulting campaign—until certain things happen.

As in his earlier novels for Ace, THE THIRTEENTH IMMORTAL and MASTER OF LIFE AND DEATH, Silverberg has written an exciting and suspense-filled story, creating (as he did in ROAD TO

A report on some books of interest to SF and fantasy readers, each book —particularly the novel by James Blish—reflecting the many facets of this field we call Science Fiction. As previously announced, this column will now appear more regularly, discussing books and matters of interest.

NIGHTFALL, which appeared last month in this magazine) a believable world filled with flesh and blood people—a rarer accomplishment than some of you may think! Recommended!

David Grinnell's effective ACROSS TIME is the companion volume.

The Lunarians, a New York science fiction fan group, held their second annual conference on Sunday, April 13th, in New York. The program featured a panel on the work of Isaac Asimov, which started with the playing of a 15 minute tape recorded by Asimov in Boston; films taken at last fall's World Science Fiction Convention in London; a panel—"What Editors Think of Fans"—in which the writer participated; and a remarkable illustrated lecture on science fiction cover art throughout the past fifty years by Sam Moskowitz, author of THE IMMORTAL STORM and noted authority on the field. The more than one hundred full color slides, illustrating the lecture, were by Dr. Christine E. Haycock.

The Flying Saucer Review's WORLD ROUNDUP OF UFO SIGHTINGS AND EVENTS (Citadel Press, $3.75), with an introduction by the Honorable Brinsley le Poer Trench, Editor of the Review, is a compilation of last year's sightings and reports similar to Morris K. Jessup's famous THE UFO ANNUAL. *(When, by the way, is some publisher going to have sense enough to get Jessup to repeat that, giving us the 1958 UFO ANNUAL, 1959 UFO ANNUAL, and so forth!)* The present compiler points out, in his introduction, that spaceships have been with us since the earliest times, that there are records of them in the Vedas, that they were known in Ancient Egypt, that the American Indians tell of them, that there are numerous references to them throughout the 19th century, and that "during all this time the spaceships have never harmed us."

Of interest, with the above in mind, is the statement of the Panel of Scientific Consultants mentioned in Ruppelt (page 271) whose statement of January 17, 1953, has only now been released by the Air Force. The Panel, headed by Professor H. P. Robertson of the California Institute of Technology, and which included Dr. Lloyd V. Berkner, concluded:

"That the evidence presented on Unidentified Flying Objects shows no indication that these phenomena constitute a direct physical threat to national security. We firmly believe that there is no residuum of cases which indicates phenomena which are attributable to foreign artifacts capable of hostile acts, and that there is no evidence that the phenomena indicate a need for the revision of current scientific concepts."

"In the light of this conclusion,

the Panel recommends: That the national security agencies take immediate steps to strip the Unidentified Flying Objects of the special status they have been given and the aura of mystery they have unfortunately acquired. We suggest that this aim may be achieved by an integrated program designed to reassure the public of the total lack of evidence of inimical forces behind the phenomena."

Paging Oliver Warbucks!

I recommend Donald A. Wollheim's interesting anthology of what the publishers describe as "Lunar Science Fiction," MEN ON THE MOON (Ace Double Books, 35 cents), stories by Murray Leinster, Bertram Chandler, Hal B. Fyfe, Frank M. Robinson and Raymond Z. Gallun. I particularly liked Leinster's story, KEYHOLE, describing what was eventually found on the Moon. Murray Leinster's novel, CITY ON THE MOON, published last year by Avalon, is the companion volume.

To turn back to Flying Saucers for a minute, the possibility has been raised several times that the UFOs could be Russian-made. The National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, of Washington, D. C., headed by Major Donald E. Keyhoe, has recently warned that Americans should not be "misled" into believing that the UFO are Soviet devices. To quote: "If the Soviet had flying saucers perfected in 1947 when they were seen en masse around the globe, by now this would be a Communist world. The ruthless, practical men in the Kremlin would never have bothered with building ordinary jets, short range missiles or the first Sputniks, if they already possessed such a tremendously superior weapon—a global flying saucer."

This magazine is obviously neutral on this question. We are for that matter neutral on the subject of UFOs themselves, presenting material on the subject—pro and con whenever possible—because of public interest in the question and not from any evangelical zeal. *Fantastic Universe* continues to be first and foremost a science fiction magazine, bringing you stimulating fantasy and science fiction and occasional articles that we feel may interest you.

On the other hand an extraordinarily persuasive case *can* be made for the possibility that at least some of the UFOs *don't* come from the planet Clarion, on the other side of Moon, or points beyond. With this in mind, watch for Ivan T. Sanderson's startling article, MAN-MADE UFO, in next month's *F.U.!*

I had meant to comment, before this, on Fred Hoyle's extremely interesting novel, THE BLACK CLOUD (Harper's, $2.95). Hoyle, author of FRONTIERS OF ASTRONOMY and THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSE, describes a black cloud, first located south of

the constellation of Orion, which it is soon realized is moving rapidly into our solar system. The appearance of this vast cloud, first considered interstellar gas, can of course bring about incalculable changes on our planet. Some startling discoveries are made as scientists work feverishly to save a world.

Alexander Marshack's THE WORLD IN SPACE (Dell Books, 35 cents) is, to quote the author, "an attempt to explain the background of the IGY and to put it —and geophysics—into historical perspective." Behind the news, as he says, "is the fact that the IGY is an expression not only of man's knowledge and daring but also of his relative ignorance of the earth he lives on and of space above him." Recommended.

Finally, let me discuss a remarkable novel.

I think it quite likely that James Blish—one of the most respected names in the field—will be remembered, years from now, not for his earlier work but as the author of the extremely interesting A CASE OF CONSCIENCE (Ballantine Books, 35 cents), which describes the problem faced by Father Ramon Ruiz-Sanchez, Clerk Regular of the Society of Jesus, a priest who is also a scientist, who faces the necessity for a decision that is as old as time and dramatically irrevocable.

A new world has been discovered. The people of this world—if they may be called that—are creatures of logic. They have no gods, no myths, no legends. They have no belief in the supernatural or the paranormal. They have no traditions. They have no tabus. The Lithian has no faith "except for an impersonal belief that he and his lot are indefinitely improvable. He is as rational as a machine. Indeed, the only way in which we can distinguish the Lithian from an organic computer is his possession and use of a moral code."

And this code is irrational.

Lithian civilization is so set up as to suggest that one can arrive at the basic axioms of Christian and Western civilization "by reason alone—in the plain face of the fact that one cannot," to quote Father Ruiz-Sanchez, by no means an Aramis. The conflict that arises out of this makes for an extremely interesting novel—a challenging and important contribution to the field! By all means read James Blish's A CASE OF CONSCIENCE!

compatible

by . . . Richard R. Smith

There are many ways—murder included—in which husbands can settle certain problems. This was even more drastic!

GEORGE stood by the fireplace, his features twisted into a grimace. "It's hell, I tell you. A living hell."

I sipped my drink and tried to think of a subtle way to change the subject. I didn't like to hear a person's personal problems and every time I visited George, he invariably complained about Helen. If it had been anyone else, I might have thought it wasn't entirely Helen's fault, but George and I had been roommates in college and I knew him like a brother. He was a person who got along with almost everyone. Intelligent, easy-going and likeable.

He lifted his glass and glared at me as if I were the guilty party. "She's a worry-wart," he continued. "A hypochondriac, a neurotic, an escapist, and a communist." He studied the ceiling thoughtfully. "And sometimes I think she's a little crazy."

I tried to calm him, "Don't worry about it. If things get worse, get a divorce."

"Divorce, ha! She wouldn't give me a divorce if—"

The door opened.

Helen smiled half-heartedly, her pale face quickly resuming its un-

Richard R. Smith has been writing SF since 1949, "except for the year that I spent climbing up and down hills in Korea." Former office manager for a construction company, and a chess enthusiast, he now writes full time and adds, "My main ambition in life is to write SF for the next forty years!"

happy expression as if it tired her facial muscles when she smiled. "Hello, Ed. Nice to see you again."

"Hello, Helen." I glanced at George and noticed he had closed his eyes as if the sight of his wife was unbearable. His lower lip was white where he gripped it with his teeth and I silently hoped he wouldn't draw blood.

Helen sank into a chair and raised her skirt to reveal her right leg. "Did George tell you about my legs?" she inquired. She stroked the leg affectionately. "Arthritis. George grafted a new one on for me. Feels ten times better."

My face blanched. The idea of replacing body parts from Banks didn't nauseate me. If a man is in an automobile accident and loses an arm, and that arm can be replaced, I think that's marvelous. What sickened me were the people who actually *enjoyed* having a part of their body replaced with a part from a criminal or corpse.

"No." I sat down. My knees were weak. I felt short of breath. "George didn't tell me. I—"

She interrupted with details of the operation. The details and list of her other ailments lasted half an hour, during which George drank steadily and I waited for a lull so I could glance at my watch and say something about being late for an appointment.

I saw George several times during the next few weeks. Never at his house. I didn't visit him on my own initiative because Helen, as I had seen during my last visit, had passed from the stage of being unpleasant and reached the stage of being unbearable. I didn't want to be around her or listen to her, and George must have realized my feelings because he didn't invite me to his house for some time.

But both of us had a habit of stopping at a club on the outskirts of town and we met there often. Each time we met, George complained. Each time, he seemed to drink more and complain more.

I worried about his job. He was a surgeon—one of the best—and a surgeon needs good nerves and steady hands when he performs delicate operations.

I urged him to get a divorce, but he said he didn't want one. "I love Helen," he said one time. "Well, I don't exactly love *Helen,* but I love her body. It's like the old saying about marrying a girl because she's pretty is like picking a rose by looking at the stem. We're all different, you know, and we all have different tastes. When I first saw Helen— Well, she's just right for me. To me, she looks as good as Marilyn Monroe looks to the average man. I like having her around. I'd be lost without her, but at the same time, she's changed so damned much, she makes me sick."

And there it was. He still wanted Helen but she had changed into a personality that he hated. Over a period of years, she had changed into a morbid hypochondriac, an unpleasant woman who enjoyed—

more than anything else—such things as having one of her legs replaced and sampling the latest pills and drugs. George said he had tried to get her to see a psychiatrist but she refused. And you can't have a person committed to a mental institution because they have an unpleasant personality!

It seemed as if there was no solution to his problem.

Then, late one evening, I received a phone call from George. "Come over and have a few drinks," he said. "We'll have a party! Helen's changed. You should see her!"

I was interested in his problem, so I went.

Helen greeted me at the door and I had the surprise of my life. At one time, she had been beautiful, but she had faded during the past few years. By staying indoors, she had grown pale, listless. As her personality changed, it had also changed her features, and her eyes had developed a sleepy, lifeless look, and deep lines had formed on her face.

But the Helen who greeted me that night was not like that. Her face had a healthy flush, her eyes sparkled and she seemed vibrant, bubbling . . . just like the Helen I had known so long ago.

George and I had a good time that night. He laughed and joked for the first time in months. We drank, talked, played chess, and then drank and talked some more.

Every now and then, Helen would float by, a gorgeous creature, laughing at George's jokes, mixing our drinks, and smiling at George as if he were the most wonderful man in the world.

When I couldn't bear it any longer, I whispered, "What happened?"

George drained his glass and shouted across the room, "Come here, Helen!"

She came.

George said, "Promise not to tell anyone? It's very important."

I couldn't imagine his reason for asking me that, but I said, "I promise."

"Well," George explained, "I can't take all the credit. I'm a fairly good surgeon, but Lucas had the hardest job. We did it together. Do you know Lucas? He's an electrical engineer . . . *a genius*. He designed that electronic calculator at—"

"Show him," Helen interrupted. *"Show him!"* She was giggling, laughing, almost jumping up and down with joy. I thought: *She's her old self again, cheerful, bubbling over . . .*

George said, "I finally realized what she needed more than anything else . . ."

He raised Helen's soft brown hair and opened a small panel in the back of her head. In the recess was a maze of tubes and electrical wiring.

"She needed a new head," George said.

Continued from back cover

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